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Lead Mahathir-Everest

PM CHALLENGES MALAYSIANS TO THE SOUTH POLE

KUALA LUMPUR, June 4 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight launched the national project to conquer Mount Everest next year and then challenged Malaysians to walk to the South Pole.

"We also want to see Malaysians going to the South Pole to walk as far as possible up to the Pole, with these achievements we will then reach all the famous places in the world.

"The highest mountain and the coldest place in the world, when we are successful, then our race will reach maturity and can compare ourselves with all the races in the world without being arrogant, only to be proud that we are no longer humiliated and looked down by anyone," he said.

Launching the Malaysia-Everest Project '97 at Dataran Merdeka here, he urged Malaysians to be highly ambitious in all aspects of life and to be willing to face challenges to achieve success.

"The race that is willing to struggle for a cause successfully will become a developed race, a happy race, a race that commands world respect. No man in the world wants to be humiliated by others, we are from one race that had been colonised for 400 years and want to remove the scars left by the former colonialists," he said.

A group of 20 mountain climbers from the Malaysian Climbing Association will try to climb the mountain in May next year and of the 20 climbers only 12 including two RTM cameramen will trek to the top part of the mountain while the rest will act as a back-up squad.

Dr Mahathir wanted the same or even better response given to the challenge to go to the South Pole.

The Prime Minister said he and other Malaysians prayed that the climbers would succeed in reaching the 8,848-metre Mount Everest peak and proudly plant the Malaysian flag.

"Although we wish for success, everything is still willed by Allah, even if we are not successful, our spirit should not be dampened but on the contrary we should try again and again until we are successful, this is the race that will achieve development," he said.

Dr Mahathir was proud of the bravery of the Malaysian climbers who dared to face the challenges in climbing Mount Everest but reminded them to be prepared for the dangers that they would face.

Those who dared and were prepared to face anything blindly were not actually brave but were out of their mind. Those who were really brave would know of all the dangers that they would face and took measures to avoid the dangers, he added.

Dr Mahathir however reminded the climbers not to be too proud when achieving success, instead they should be humble and always be aware that they were championing the cause of the nation and the people.

The Prime Minister later handed over the Malaysian flag to the president of the Malaysian Climbing Association, Encik Noor Ramlle Sulaiman and was introduced to the 28 members of the Mount Everest climbing expedition.

Of the 28 members, 20 are climbers, while the rest are committee members including RTM cameramen.

If the expedition is successful, Malaysia will be the first Southeast Asian country to conquer Mount Everest.

The project, estimated to cost RM4.5 million, is a brainchild of Dr Mahathir, who once said: "We must have confidence to achieve all of our

dreams, this includes climbing the Everest, sailing across the Pacific, conquering the Arctic and Antarctic."

It is jointly organised by the Youth and Sports Ministry, Malaysian Climbing Association and Sports and Culture Foundation of Malaysia.

The ministry has allocated RM300,000 as permit payment to the Nepal government for the right to scale Mount Everest. The public and private sectors have been asked to contribute to make up the balance.

Various programmes in preparation for the expedition started last year, including mountain-climbing training at Shingri Glacier in India and Mount Cook Aspring in New Zealand.

Sir Edmund Hillary and his guide Tenzing Norgay Sherpa became the first persons to reach the peak of Mount Everest on May 29 1953. -- BERNAMA

AFY AO