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Adventure through 12 African nations by 4x4 expedition

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SHAH ALAM, Thurs. - After months of intensive physical and mental training, the 55 members of the Silverstone TransAfrica 4x4 Expedition - a Malaysian mission of peace, goodwill and harmony to Africa - left for Cape Town via Malaysia Airlines tonight.

The expedition team, which includes six women, will traverse 17,000km in 33 days, covering 12 African countries.

The route starts from Cape Town in South Africa to Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan before finishing in Cairo, Egypt.

The Silverstone TransAfrica 4x4 Expedition, under the patronage of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is to date the world's biggest organised effort to take on the fabled and treacherous north-south route across the African continent.

Silverstone's executive director Phang Wai Yeen said the expedition was a sincere Malaysia Incorporated effort to strengthen solidarity between Malaysia and countries in Africa.

The theme of the expedition is "a mission of peace, goodwill and harmony from Malaysia to Africa" and Phang said this meant the expedition carried with it noble objectives, above those of physical challenge and adventure.

He said the 55 Malaysians would represent the country as ambassadors to Africa, interacting at the grassroots level and strengthening bilateral ties between Malaysians and Africans.

Phang said Silverstone had succeeded in organising and accomplishing expeditions of international stature.

They included the Silverstone Transpen International Jungle Challenges '94 and '95 which drew participants from over 13 countries to take on the challenges of Malaysia's oldest rainforests.

Asked how the 55 participants for the Silverstone TransAfrica 4x4 Expedition were selected, he said they had to qualify by having 4x4 driving prowess, ensuring they were physically fit, mentally alert and agile.

"The participants also underwent a strict personality test which requires them to be mature, well-informed, capable of representing Malaysia and open-minded in accepting the different culture and ways of Africans," he said, adding that they also had to undergo rigorous and intensive training.

Expedition organising chairman George Wong said 16 KMA Isuzu 4WD vehicles using Silverstone MT117EX tyres would be used during the expedition.

Expedition adviser Tan Sri Zain Hashim said Wisma Silverstone would serve as the nerve centre of information for the duration of the expedition until Jan 6 next year.

He said the information centre would be open to students from the universities, colleges and schools to enable them to follow the expedition and know more about African countries.

One of the participants, Dr Malik Feisal Ayob, 29, said he had always wanted to do something unusual and was glad he could go on the expedition.

Another participant Jenny Gunn, 22, said the expedition was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

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