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Cash and honour for Everest team

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CLIMBERS of the Malaysia Everest expedition will receive a minimum of RM20,000 in monetary reward each, Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim says.

The two climbers who reached the peak, Mr M. Magendran and Mr N. Mohandas, will be given an additional RM30,000 each for making the country proud.

Anwar said this yesterday after receiving the flag which was planted at the peak of Mount Everest from the climbers.

"In addition, a RM20,000 bonus will be given to the leader of the expedition, Encik Nor Ramllee Sulaiman, as well as to the leader of the climbers Major Rizan Mat Hassan," he said.

The two other climbers who made the attempt but did not reach the peak, Encik Mohd Fauzan Hassan and Mr Gary Choong, will also receive an additional RM20,000 bonus each.

Besides the monetary rewards, the 23 climbers will be awarded the Pingat Darjah Kebesaran in conjunction with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong's birthday celebrations.

Anwar, during a luncheon held in honour of the expedition members, said he was proud not only because it proved that "Malaysia boleh", but also because the mountain was conquered by a group of young Malaysians.

"This team will be given a chance to travel round the country to give testimonies and to show the young that by working as a team with discipline, training, perseverance and commitment... anything can be achieved," Anwar said.

The Acting Prime Minister joked that after conquering the Everest, the climbers will now have time for their families or even look into matters like marriage.

On the expedition's next conquest, he said: "I will personally be with them but we have not determined which mountain we will climb next. Don't underestimate us... however we will start by climbing a mountain that is not too high," he told the audience in jest.

He added that he will ask the team to encourage the young to take up mountain climbing as it is a healthy pursuit.

Anwar also said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Ali, were constantly concerned about the well-being of the climbers. They are overwhelmed by the successful climb, he added.

"The Prime Minister asked me over and over again if I was meeting the team, and I said 'Yes' ... and he also asked me if the Government is giving them anything, and I said 'Yes.' This shows how much concern Dr Mahathir has for the Malaysian team," he said, adding that the Government will continue to support the team's future activities.

Meanwhile, Sports and Culture Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the Government has also given US\$3,000 (US\$1 = RM2.51) in compensation to the family of the Sherpa guide, Mr Nima Rinche, who died during the expedition.

The money, together with an additional US\$1,000 contributed by the Malaysian climbers, will be put in a trust fund for the late guide's three children.

When asked if the amount was sufficient, Muhyiddin said: "Yes, it is the normal amount that is given. There is also insurance."

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