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Cash awards in store for Mount Everest team members

Jasbir Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The two Malaysians who conquered Mount Everest - M. Magendran and N. Mohandas - will each receive a RM50,000 reward from the Government, Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin announced today.

He said the other two climbers who almost made it - Mohd Fauzan Hassan and Gary Chong and the expedition leaders Nor Ramlle Suleiman and Mejar Mohamed Rizan Hassan would get RM40,000, while the rest of the team RM20,000 each.

The rewards were announced at a luncheon hosted by Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to honour the climbers who returned to Malaysia today.

Also present were Anwar's wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Deputy Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Loke Yuen Yow, the Ministry's parliamentary secretary Datuk Shahrizat Jalil and Umno Youth Head Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

Anwar said the climbers had done the country proud by their feat and said the success of the climbers would show others that they could achieve anything if they were committed to the task.

"We will also invite the team to go on a roadshow around the country to tell their experience so that they can inspire others and promote the sport."

Anwar said he had already spoken to Muhyiddin, Nor Ramlle Sulaiman, Magendran and Mohandas and had told them that they could take a rest for a while but there were still a few more mountains to climb.

"We want to take them and some young people to climb a mountain so that they can help popularise the sport," he said.

Anwar said the Government had already suggested special recognition for the climbers by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar during the investiture ceremony in conjunction with his birthday on Saturday.

He said the Cabinet has already agreed to the suggestion but it would have to depend on the King.

Muhyiddin said the success of the Everest '97 expedition was a good beginning and would not be the first and the last.

"After this, we hope to carry out an expedition once every three years and initiate other programmes to increase participation in the sport."

Muhyiddin said a concert would also be organised by the Ministry on June 14 at Dataran Merdeka to enable the public to have a closer look at the heroes.

"A state dinner is also being planned for the climbers and would be held when the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad comes back from his leave."

"We will also take the climbers for an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong."

On plans to exhibit the climbers' gear at the National Museum as part of the country's history, Muhyiddin said this would be done after the roadshow was completed.

Asked whether the cost of the expedition had exceeded the RM5 million budget, Muhyiddin said the accounts had not been finalised yet.

On the fate of the widow of Nima Rinzi, one of the team's guides who fell off a cliff, Muhyiddin said a sum of US\$4,000 had been given to his widow.

"We have decided to put the money as a trust fund for the sherpas three children. "

Asked if the money was enough, Muhyddin said the amount represented the standard sum paid by expedition organisers to widows of Sherpas who died on expeditions.

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