

03 JUN 1997

Everest-Return

MALAYSIA'S EVEREST TEAM WELCOMED HOME AS HEROES

KUALA LUMPUR, June 3 (Bernama) -- Climbers M.Magendran and N.Mohandas and the rest of the Malaysian Everest expedition team were given a rousing and emotional welcome when they returned here today.

The team, especially Magendran and Mohandas who conquered the world's highest peak on May 23, were mobbed by more than 5,000 well-wishers including their families who had jammed Terminal One of the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport.

Shouts of "Malaysia Boleh" and "Yakin Boleh" filled the air as the team emerged from the VIP exit to be welcomed by kompang groups, a lion dance team and a military band.

Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who was in Kathmandu to congratulate the team, also returned on the same TG 415 flight via Bangkok that touched down at 11.40am.

Students of Sekolah Menengah Teluk Gong of Klang held a banner proclaiming "Selamat Pulang Wira Cikgu Magendran" in honour of the 33-year-old climber who is a teacher of the school.

Staff of Shell Malaysia were also there to greet Mohandas, 36, who is an administrative assistant with Shell Trading Sdn Bhd.

Also present were representatives of youth organisations from all over the country, Umno Youth and MIC Youth.

The scene outside the terminal building was a riot of colours with well-wishers carrying banners and the Malaysian flag and jostling against each other to heap garlands upon garlands on Magendran and Mohandas who were chaired above the crowd.

The team was later whisked to the Prime Minister's Department where Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim will grace an official welcome ceremony for the team.

Anwar will also host a lunch for them.

Magendran and Mohandas did the nation proud by being the first Malaysians to conquer Everest at 2.10pm on May 23, the climax of a 59-day assault of the Himalaya peak.

Their success came a week before Nepali authorities closed the climbing route due to the advent of the monsoon season at the end of May.

The two were a part of the first ever 20-member expedition led by Nor Ramlle Sulaiman in a project mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who also launched it on June 4, last year.

The Prime Minister also presented the Malaysian flag to the team on Feb 28, the eve of their departure for Nepal.

The Malaysian climbers reached the Everest Base Camp on March 26 and 10 of them began undergoing six weeks of acclimatisation from April 1.

The assault of the 8,848 metre high summit, originally planned for early last month, had to be postponed because of strong winds at more than 120 kph at Camp 4.

Mohd Fauzan Hassan and Gary Choong who ascended with Magendran and Mohandas did not make it to the peak and had to return to Camp 4 (7,955 m) because of health conditions. -- BERNAMA

NI RM