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## Malaysian climbers conquer Everest

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Two Malaysian mountain climbers conquered Mount Everest in the climax of a two-month and first ever assault on the world's highest peak by a Malaysian expedition.

Defying the odds, 33-year-old Klang school teacher M. Magendran set foot on the summit to plant the Malaysian flag atop the 8,848m snow capped peak at 2.10pm Malaysian time (11.55am Nepal time).

He was joined there 15 minutes later by N. Mohandas, a father of three who works as an administrative assistant with Shell Trading Sdn Bhd.

"I have made it," were the first words uttered by the jubilant Magendran when he contacted team leader Mej Rizan Mat Hassan, waiting anxiously at Camp Two located below at 6,492m.

Bernama reports that news of the achievement was relayed at 2.15pm (Malaysian time) to the rest of the team at the Everest Base Camp down at 5,400m.

The RTM crew led by anchor Aminuddin Abu Samah kept millions of Malaysians at home updated throughout a six-hour "live" telecast.

Magendran and Mohandas, accompanied by five Sherpa guides, stayed at the peak for 40 minutes despite strong winds.

Among the first to congratulate the team was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is currently in London, and Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The success of the Malaysian pair came a week before Nepali authorities close the climbing season due to the monsoon season which ensues at the end of this month or early June.

Two Canadians were reported to have also made it to the peak today.

Seven climbers of various nationalities lost their lives while on the same mission last week.

Magendran and Mohandas were part of a final four-member team which begun their ascent to the summit at 11pm (Nepal time) yesterday from South Col, otherwise known as Camp Four located at altitude 8,000m.

But two members of the team, Mohd Fauzan Hassan and Gary Choong had to withdraw.

Fauzan, 39, was advised by their Sherpa guides to drop out four hours later after suffering a stomach upset.

Two hours later, an exhausted Choong, 29, was assisted down to South Col by two Sherpas, according to the Project Malaysia-Everest '97 secretariat in Kuala Lumpur.

Magendran and Mohandas are reported to be making their way down to the same camp where they will rest overnight before continuing their descent.

In London, Dr Mahathir, elated at the success, said while he was unable to speak to the two climbers, he had used another way to convey his congratulations.

"I sent them an e-mail, advising them to be careful on their way down from the peak," he said. "They should be just as careful as when they made the ascent."

Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in congratulating the Malaysian team, said the success showed that Malaysians were capable of doing whatever they set their hearts on if there was determination, discipline and the will to work as a team.

Congratulations also poured in from various leaders including Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri

Shahidan Kassim, Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Khalil Yaakob, Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee and Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Abu Zahar who spoke immediately after he was sworn in.

Deputy Transport Minister and 4B Youth President Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam also sent his praises with Malaysian Youth Council president Suhaimi Ibrahim and social activist Datuk Lee Lam Thye.

(END)