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Mahathir-Everest

PM FLAGS OFF MALAYSIA-EVEREST '97 PROJECT CLIMBERS

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 28 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today "flagged-off" the national climbers under the Malaysia-Everest '97 project, marking the start of a long journey for Malaysia to achieve yet another dream.

The ceremony, held at the Prime Minister's Department, was also attended by Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yasin and Malaysian Climbing Association president Noor Ramlle Sulaiman.

The Prime Minister launched the national project to conquer the 8,848-metre Mount Everest at Dataran Merdeka on June 4, last year when he also issued a challenge to Malaysians to walk to the South Pole.

Jointly organised by the Youth and Sports Ministry, Malaysian Climbing Association and Sports and Culture Foundation of Malaysia, the project, estimated to cost RM4.5 million, is a brainchild of Dr Mahathir, who once said: "We must have the confidence to achieve all our dreams...this includes climbing the Everest, sailing across the Pacific, conquering the Arctic and Antarctic."

A group of 20 mountain climbers from the Malaysian Climbing Association will try to climb the mountain and of the 20 climbers, only 12 including two RTM cameramen, would trek to the top part of the mountain to plant the Malaysian flag while the rest will act as a back-up squad.

The 10 climbers who will try to scale the peak of the Everest to create yet another history for the country are N.Mohanadas, Aimy Zairin Mohamed, Hussin Ali, M.Magendran, Zahidi Paiman, Zahari Salleh, Mohd Fauzan Hassan, Borhan Ibrahim, Major Mohd Rizan Mat Hassan and Kpl M.Maniam.

They were in Manali, India last month on a two-week stint to acclimatise themselves to the Himalayan conditions in preparation for their mission.

Various programmes in preparation for the expedition started in 1995, including mountain-climbing training at Shingri Glacier in India and Mount Cook Aspring in New Zealand.

The mountain climbers will leave for Nepal, armed with 70 to 100 tonnes of food and clothings specially made in Italy, France and the United States to withstand the cold weather conditions there which sometimes dip to as low as -70 degrees Celsius when the wind starts to blow.

From Kathmandu, the expedition will travel to Kukla on March 4 where all the administrative work will be done before ascending on March 9. The climbers are expected to reach the peak between May 1 and 20.

If the expedition is successful, Malaysia will be the first Southeast Asian country to conquer Mount Everest.

Sir Edmund Hillary and his guide, Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, became the first persons to reach the peak of Mount Everest on May 29, 1953. --

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