

01/03/1997

PM reminds Everest climbers to be vigilant

Adeline Ong

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday reminded the 20 Malaysia-Everest '97 climbers not to take unnecessary risks in achieving their goal of planting the Malaysian flag at the summit of Mount Everest.

Dr Mahathir reminded the climbers that they needed to be careful and to follow instructions.

"You need to consider all the dangers and avoid it. Don't try to be a hero because it will not do you or the country any good if you get hurt," Dr Mahathir advised when he presented the Malaysian flag to the climbers in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"A person will not be considered brave if he is willing to face a challenge without taking into account the dangers that go with it," he said, adding that in a case like that, it would not be bravery but foolishness.

"At a glance, we will think that climbing Mount Everest serves no purpose. But in fact, to take on such a challenge will make us more aware of our presence and strength.

"The ability to face dangerous situations and handle them will help build the spirit of the climbers," Dr Mahathir said.

The ceremony marked the start of a long journey for Malaysia to achieve yet another dream.

The Prime Minister launched the national project to conquer the 8,848-metre Mount Everest at Merdeka Square 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."

The climbers who will try to plant the Malaysian flag at the peak of the 8,848m mountain in May this year leave for Kathmandu today.

Expedition leader Nor Ramli Sulaiman said the team trained rigorously for three years in preparation for the climb. Only 10 out of the 20 climbers will go for the summit, while the rest will act as back-ups.

"We underwent intensive training and conditioning climbs in Alpine conditions.

"Twenty-five climbers were selected for the expedition line-up. Then, further tests were held on Mount Kinabalu to select those with more stamina for the summit team," he said.

Technical expertise from the mountaineering associations of India and Nepal was sought to help the Malaysian climbers during the training.

Nor Ramli said his main concern is the safety of his team members, adding that they will take all the necessary precautions to ensure the climb is a safe one.

Climbing permits were booked from the Nepalese Government in 1986. The Sports and Youth Ministry gave the project a boost when it endorsed a fee of RM300,000 for the permit.

An additional RM400,000 will be billed to the Malaysian team by the Nepalese trekking agency acting as the official guide for the mountaineers in the expedition.

The cost incurred by the agency includes food and lodging at the base

camp, Sherpa guides and liaison officer, equipment for hire and helicopter rescue from the base camp.

Pre-summit food specially ordered for the summit team is estimated to cost RM80,000. This covers a specially formulated diet for high-altitude mountaineering.

The climbers will have to rely on lightweight food bars and special liquid supplements. The specially formulated nourishment is vital to their survival.

Special group equipment is estimated to cost RM300,000 (tents, ropes, cooking gear and climbing accessories) while individual gear for climbers is estimated at RM15,000 per person.

Personal accident insurance is also a requirement. A premium of RM500,000 for a sum of RM14 million insurance for the expedition. This is to assure the summit team that their lives are placed in high priority without compromise.

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

(END)