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Mahathir-Expedition

NO REASON TO DELAY NORTH POLE FREE-FALL, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 29 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today there is no reason to delay several programmes including the North Pole Free-Fall because of current economic woes.

The prime minister said such programmes had nothing to do with the regional economic turmoil caused by the weakened currencies.

"What has it got to do with economy...its (the expedition) cost is not that much...if that's the case then we have to postpone Sukom, football, we postpone everything then everyone will sit and lament over the economy," he said when asked to comment on a suggestion that the expedition be postponed until the economy recovered.

He was speaking to reporters after launching the free-fall expedition to the North Pole at the Royal Malaysian Air Force Base at Sungei Besi, here.

Dr Mahathir also witnessed a display by 16 parachutists who would make up the expedition. The expedition, which included woman parachutist Nordziah Mohd Noor, would plant the national flag "Jalur Gemilang", at the North Pole. A Proton Wira 1.5 would also be dropped together with the group.

At the ceremony, Dr Mahathir also handed over the national flag to expedition leader, Abdul Rahim Dahalan.

On Friday, the expedition members would leave for Moscow, Russia and on April 15 they would depart for Khatanga, Siberia to make final preparation and train for three days.

On April 18, the group would leave for the North Pole and all the 16 parachutists are scheduled to make their jump at a height of 3,000 metres (10,000 feet). -- BERNAMA

ARA AO