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1st ever try by a tropical nation for the North Pole

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday launched yet another challenge by Malaysians to put the country on the world map.

Dr Mahathir said the "North Pole Freefall Expedition", will be the first ever attempt by Malaysians to sky dive and parachute into the North Pole.

Last year, Malaysians scaled Mount Everest, the highest peak in the world.

"In fact, this will be the first ever attempt by people from a tropical country, who have never experienced snow, to sky dive and parachute into the North Pole," said Dr Mahathir.

The Prime Minister said a Proton Wira Aeroback will also be "dropped", along with members of the freefall expedition team.

"This will be a rare occasion to see a car produced in a tropical country being 'dropped' into the North Pole," he said. However, this will be the second time a car is "dropped" into the North Pole. The Volkswagen was the first.

While expressing his confidence that the 16-member expedition team will achieve success, Dr Mahathir reminded them to be careful and hoped they would make the country proud.

"They should be aware that the danger is not only when they jump from the aircraft at 10,000 feet and parachute. The area they are going to land on in the North Pole will also pose a danger."

On a lighter note, Dr Mahathir said members of the expedition team should not be afraid because "there will be no poles at the North Pole".

Later at a press conference, Dr Mahathir said such expeditions should not be linked with economic activities and thus should not be postponed due to the current economic problems.

"What is the connection between this expedition and economy? Not much. If we really want to take into consideration the present economic problems, then we should postpone other (sports) activities as well such as Sukom (Commonwealth Games), football... postpone all. Let us all sit down crying over the economic problems," he said.

Meanwhile, organising chairman Datuk Dr Ibrahim Saad said Malaysia will be the seventh country to try a parachute freefall in the North Pole.

"However, all the six countries before us were western countries and this is the first attempt by those from a tropical country to jump and parachute in the North Pole," he added.

The expedition team, comprising those from the Defence, Police and Federal Territory Parachuting Club as well as a TV3 crew, will leave for Moscow on April 3 to acclimatise to the cold.

The team then goes to Khatanga on April 15 and will remain there for three days before proceeding to the North Pole. The team will be in the North Pole for three hours and is expected to return to Malaysia on April 23.

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