

31/01/2001

Smart team leaves for Gandhinagar

PETALING JAYA, Tues. - The Special Malaysian Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team (Smart) departed for Gandhinagar tonight from the Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Subang to assist Indian authorities and other multinational teams to search for earthquake survivors.

The team was sent off by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Bernard Dompok and Indian High Commissioner to Malaysia Veena Sikri.

The 24-member team, led by its deputy commander Superintendent Jamil Saadun, was accompanied by a National Security Council officer and five local Pressmen, including a television crew. The SMART team comprise specialists in paramedics, engineering and rescue and members from the Fire and Rescue Department, the Armed Forces and the police.

Dompok, later reporters that the rescuers would use their experience in helping the victims with a high level of professionalism.

"Malaysia is happy to assist India in her hour of need.

"We are proud that the Smart Team is once again called into action."

This is the second major assignment for the SMART team. Last year, its members provided assistance for earthquake victims in Turkey.

The Malaysian delegation will make a stop-over in the Tamil Nadu state of Chennai before proceeding to Ahmedabad.

From there, they will be transferred either by road or air to Bhuj, which is the worst affected area.

An estimated 20,000 people are believed to have been killed in last Friday's earthquake with thousands of others injured. The earthquake was measured with an intensity of 7.9 on the Richter scale.

Malaysia is the seventh nation to send a rescue team after Turkey, Russia, Switzerland, Britain, Italy and France.

Meanwhile, Sikri commended the New Straits Times' effort to set up the Gujarat Earthquake Fund.

"India needs all the aid and support it can get, both financially and materially.

"We also cherish the gesture of friendship from the Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad), the Foreign Minister (Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar) and Malaysians as a whole," added Sikri.

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