

Death railway expedition walkers reach destination

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By S.S. YOGA

THREE PAGODA PASS (Thailand): Behind a backdrop of three white pagodas at the Thai-Myanmar border, the three expedition walkers ended their 240km journey yesterday, despite the occurrence of a border skirmish between two Myanmar hill tribes the night before.

After a 15km walk from Songkalai at the northern edge of the Kham Laem Dam to Upper Sonkarai the "Retracing the Construction Route of the Thai-Burma Death Railway" expedition walkers, Aussie Laurence Sams and two Malaysian ex-commandos Mansor Amir and Abu Bakar Hussain, reached their final destination, two days ahead of schedule.

In a simple ceremony, project co-ordinator Datuk Abdul Rahim Dahalan offered prayers of thanks for their safe and successful 11-day journey and

also for the railway construction victims.

The team sang Negara Ku and Abdul Rahim recited the *Ode to the Fallen*. Sams then sang the Australian national anthem Australia Fair.

Both countries' flags were then handed to Abdul Rahim, who said the Malaysian flag would be presented to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad while the Aussie flag to the Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia.

"The aim of retracing the journey has been successfully completed and even though it did not reflect the actual conditions that the forced labour and prisoners of war faced, in spirit it was," said Abdul Rahim.

He added that there was still another objective to be met - the 104km stretch from Three Pagoda Pass to Thambyuzayat in Myanmar.

He said this, however,

would be a future project and if possible, involve the participation of a survivor.

He called on the Malaysian and Australian governments to support the project, adding that he hoped the National Museum, anthropologists and historians would participate.

"Now that awareness has been created on this blank piece of our history, we hope to create a foundation to look at the survivors and victims of the railway construction and record all their details to recognise their sacrifices and contribution," he said, adding that as the event took place here it was significant to have the memorial here and perhaps one in Malaysia.

The team is on their way to Bangkok where they will take the train to Kuala Lumpur to arrive on Oct 28 before proceeding to Putrajaya where they are expected to receive certificates from Dr Mahathir (as the project's patron).