

29/04/2004

Our scientists to explore Antarctic waters next year

PENANG, Wed. - Malaysia's Antarctic research will rise a notch higher next year when three local scientists become the first Asians to dive in the icy waters of the 'White Continent'.

The expedition, led by Universiti Sains Malaysia's Professor Dr Zulfigar Yasin, will also see the university's marine taxonomists Mahadi Mohamad and Sazlina Md Salleh diving for benthic organisms (organisms which live at the bottom of the sea).

(Taxonomists are those who study the classification of plants and animals according to their presumed natural relationships.)

They are believed to be the first Asians to explore the waters and experience the vastness and beauty of what is considered by many as the "last frontier on Earth".

"Less than five countries in the world, including Australia and Norway, have so far sent divers to the Antarctica," Zulfigar said after a Press conference to announce the Second Malaysian International Seminar on Antarctica Global Laboratory for Scientific and International Cooperation to be held in Penang from May 3 to May 5.

Ahead of the trip, Zulfigar and his team have begun rigorous training by doing trial dives off Semporna in Sabah and Langkawi.

"Although our diving activities have been on-going, we are now incorporating some of the diving protocols required in the harsh conditions of the Antarctica, which is surrounded by the stormy Southern Ocean," said Zulfigar, who last year led a team of three USM researchers on a three-month research-cum-study trip to Antarctica with a group of Australian scientists.

Antarctica is the fifth largest continent and the world's deep freeze, with the temperature at -128.6 degrees Fahrenheit. Zulfigar and his team is likely to interact with seals, penguins, along with large and beautiful sea anemones (marine polyps which resemble flowers) and starfish during their dive.

Also present at the Press conference was USM School of Biological Sciences dean Professor Mashhor Mansor.

Next week's seminar is an effort to facilitate the promotion of scientific research by Malaysian scientists on Antarctica.

Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad will present a keynote address at the seminar.

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