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Sharifah wants to be first woman to trek solo across the Antarctic

SEPANG, Fri. - At the end of the year, Datin Paduka Sharifah Mazlina Syed Abdul Kadir will embark on a perilous journey that no woman has attempted before. If she succeeds, she will be the first woman in the world to trek solo across the Antarctic from the South Pole.

To prepare herself for this mammoth undertaking, the 38-year-old sports lecturer with Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), trained on a daring solo pre-expedition exercise at the Antarctic in January.

Now, as the scheduled date of her actual expedition draws closer, she continues her training in Norway, the homeland of her coach Ronnie Finnas.

A well-known polar adventurer, Finnas was the one who trained Sharifah on her pre-expedition.

For the next month, her training will continue at two ski resorts in Finse, Norway. At the core of the gruelling training programme will be down-hill skiing, something that Sharifah is expected to do at least seven hours a day.

Her time in Norway will also be filled with ski-sailing, kite-sailing and improving her camping skills.

"I have to reduce the time spent on pitching a tent," she told a Press Conference just before leaving for Norway last night. "It takes me a whole hour to put up a tent; it's difficult to move fast with such thick gloves on."

Sharifah hopes to train at another ski resort after she gets back from Norway but this depends on sponsorship and whether she can find an ideal location.

Canada, where she first learnt to ski, and lived as a student, is one destination she has in mind.

However, without funding she will have no choice but to spend time at the artificial snow house at Genting Highlands to acclimatise herself to extreme cold.

Barring bad weather, Sharifah will set off on the actual expedition on Dec 12. It will cover 1,100 kilometres and the route will take her from the South Pole to Hercules Inlet, located at the edge of the Antarctic. The journey is expected to take 30 days.

Sharifah says that she could not have come this far if weren't for the help of certain individuals, among whom are Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed, the Sultan of Johor, Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, UiTM Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Ibrahim Shah, Associate Professor Dr Mohd Kamil Ibrahim and Hazimah Zainuddin.

"I'm very grateful for their support; they've been encouraging from the start," said Sharifah. "I also hope that all Malaysians are behind me. If anybody wants to get in touch with me, they can send me an e-mail to goodpschup@hotmail.com."