

Tajuk : Special Olympics Athletes End Centralised Training At UNIMAS

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KUCHING: Sarawak athletes who will be representing Malaysia in next year's Special Olympics winter games have to brace themselves for the harsh cold weather conditions there.

Only one of their team members had competed in the winter games and the rest are newcomers who have not competed internationally.

Special Olympics Club of Kuching president Datin Dayang Marini Abang Zain said the athletes will be leaving for South Korea a week before the games start in order to acclimatise with the weather conditions there.

Next year's event will be held at Pyeongchang, South Korea from Jan 29 to Feb 5.

Malaysia's challenge in next year's Special Olympics winter games floor hockey event are spearheaded by 13 athletes from Sarawak who came from Kuching, Bau and Miri.

The majority of the athletes are also students from special education classes (PPKI) of SMK Demak Baru in Jalan Diplomatik, Kuching.

According to Marini, the cold weather will be a challenge for the national team members because this is their first time competing in cold conditions. Siew Yong Hock from SMB St Joseph Miri is the only athlete who competed in the 2009 Special Olympics where Malaysia won silver after losing to Cuba in the grand finals.

"We are grateful for UNIMAS to play host for the team's centralised training camp because they (athletes) do not have a proper venue to training or to train regularly," she said during the closing ceremony of the athletes' centralised training held at the east campus of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS).

Marini also commended the university's students' welfare unit (HEP) which has provided 46 volunteers to assist the coaches throughout the camp period.

According to her, the athletes are really excited with the prospect of spearheading Malaysia's challenge in the upcoming games although many of them have yet to compete internationally.

"We have a series of programme and activities to be undertaken, but coincidentally the trip to the winter games will be the first for us at Special Olympics Club of Kuching," she said.

Plans are in the pipeline for a carnival-like launching ceremony of Special Olympics Club of Kuching where members of the public are invited to join the merry making and for them to consider joining the club as members or volunteers.

Meanwhile, UNIMAS vice chancellor Professor Datuk Khairuddin Ab Hamid praised the athletes for showing true grit and that despite their disabilities they are still able to represent the country in the Special Olympics.

Khairuddin was also present to witness a floor hockey demonstration game performed by the athletes on the final day of their centralised training camp held at UNIMAS east campus hall yesterday.

He commended the determined athletes who had done Sarawak proud for being selected to represent Malaysia for the second time to the world's largest sports organisation for children and adults with intellectual disabilities.