

THE ROAD TO EVEREST

The team will depart tomorrow for Kathmandu, Nepal, where they will first climb the 6,400m Mount Lobuche in the Himalayan mountain range.

This is to acclimatise themselves to the snowy, high-altitude environment before beginning their ascent of

Mount Everest, which has a height of 8,848m — just under the cruising altitude of commercial planes.

Each climber will have one guide.

There will also be porters and cooks.

Their expedition will last from March 25 to June 10. They hope to

summit Mount Everest by May 28.

The team hopes to climb Mount Everest this year as a way of celebrating SG50, and have attracted a range of sponsors, such as Aluminaid, Samwoh Corporation, and philanthropist Tan Chin Hwee.



UPWARDS: Aluminaid Team Singapura Everest 2015 members climbing Nepal's Cho Oyu, the sixth-highest mountain in the world, during a training climb last year.

PHOTOS: ALUMINAID TEAM SINGAPURA EVEREST 2015

Reports by **CHIN YONG CHANG**
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As Aluminaid Team Singapura Everest 2015's team leader, he was set to conquer the world's tallest mountain after years of planning and training.

But on their last big training climb last year, Mr Muhammad Hilwan Mohammad Idrus, 29, hit an insurmountable hurdle — he suffered a stroke.

His five-year Everest plans went downhill during the final training expedition in September at Cho Oyu, another Himalayan peak.

Since Mr Muhammad Hilwan only had headaches, he and his team first dismissed it as altitude sickness.

He had always been the most susceptible one in his team to that problem, which usually can be alleviated by recovering at a lower altitude.

When he told his team he felt better after resting for two days in a lower mountain camp, he went on to conquer the 8,200m peak.

But that may be the last mountain he ever climbs.

He returned to Singapore on Oct 2 and did not seek medical attention until two consecutive days of headaches finally made him visit a polyclinic.

Then came the shock.

It had been a stroke, which could have killed him.

He said: "My doctor told me I was not supposed to be alive."

He was immediately taken to Tan Tock Seng Hospital, where he was warded for 10 days.

Mr Muhammad Hilwan, who had quit his job to join the team, is bitterly disappointed that he will not be with the expedition as they leave Singapore tomorrow.

He said: "I was extremely disappointed that I could not join them after all the years of training together. They are like my family, and I wish I could be there for the final climb."

Since the team set their sights on Mount Everest when it was formed in 2010, they have put their lives on hold to chase their dream.

Mr Seumas Yeo, 26, the youngest member of the team and who had just

Stroke ends his Everest dream

But expedition team will carry on to climb world's tallest mountain

graduated from the Singapore Management University, is waiting to finish the expedition before looking for a job.

New team leader Nur Yusrina Ya'akob, 27, a primary school teacher, and brothers Mr Ismail Latiff, 35, and Mr Zulkifli Latiff, 42, who both work in the Singapore Civil Defence Force, also took time out of their jobs.

Even though they found sponsors, money has been tight.

The team members spent their own cash buying their climbing equipment, including harnesses, ice picks and snow shoes, spending about \$10,000 to \$20,000 each over the five years of training.

Mr Yeo used up \$4,000 in savings and borrowed \$16,000 from his parents.

His mother, Madam Calin Tan, 51, said: "It may be expensive, but I am willing to pay for it if it means that much to him."

PREPARATIONS

To prepare for the climb, they scaled a progressively higher series of mountains in other countries to prepare themselves from the final 8,800m ascent on Mount Everest.

In March 2011, they climbed the 4,000m-high Mount Kinabalu before moving on to mountains in colder climates, such as Nepal's Island Peak and Mera Peak in May 2012.

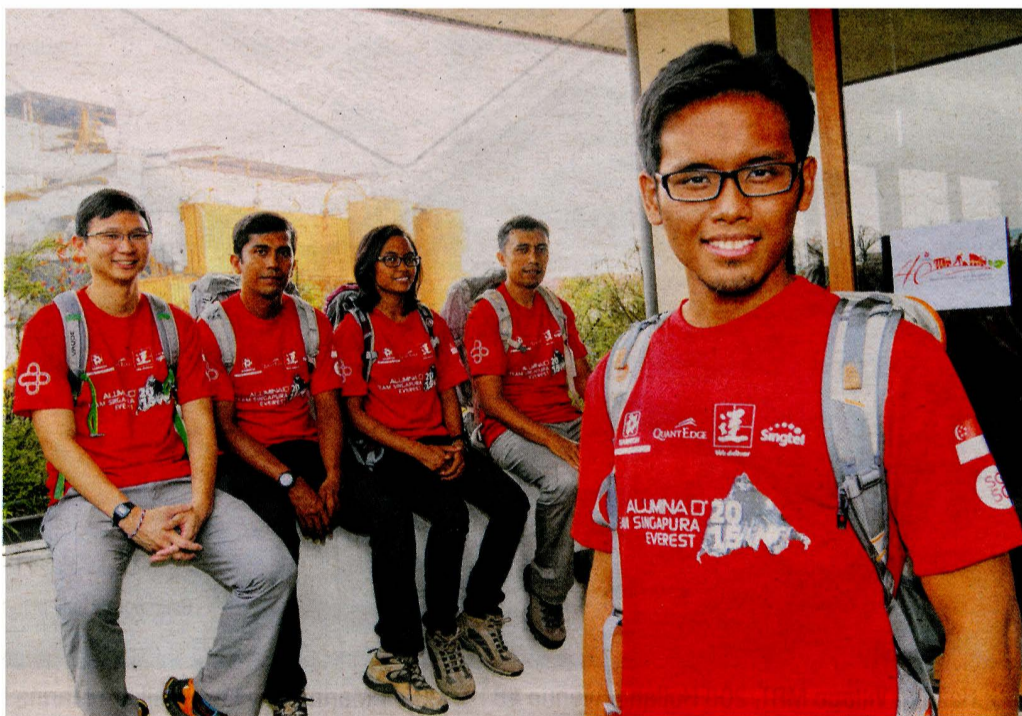
Despite knowing how dangerous the expedition could be, their families are fully behind them.

Madam Tan said: "If I said I wasn't worried for Seumas, I'd be lying. But if this is something that he finds meaningful then I will support him. I am extremely proud of him."

Mr Zulkifli and his wife have three children, aged three to 13, who are fully behind him.

His wife, Ms Noraini Abu Bakar, 39, a public service officer, said: "When he told me he wanted to climb Mount Everest, we discussed the risks involved and what would happen if he were to meet with an accident.

"Ultimately I support him because I trust he knows what he is doing, and I won't stop him from doing something he so strongly believes in."



TOGETHER: Aluminaid Team Singapura Everest 2015 members (from left) Mr Seumas Yeo, Mr Ismail Latiff, Ms Nur Yusrina Ya'akob, Mr Zulkifli Latiff and Mr Muhammad Hilwan. TNP PHOTO: SHAHRIYA YAHAYA