

Singaporean, 26, to scale Mount Everest via Tibetan route



Jeremy Tong (left) is looking to bounce back from his setback after hypothermia derailed him from summiting the world's tallest mountain on his maiden attempt. PHOTO: NTU-NIE EVEREST TEAM

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Yuen Sin

SINGAPORE - His maiden attempt at conquering Mount Everest in May was foiled by a sudden onset of hypothermia just 200m from the summit.

But mountaineer Jeremy Tong, 26, who returned to Singapore earlier this month (June) with team-mates Nur Yusrina Ya'akob, 30, and Dr Arjunan Saravana Pillai, 47, is working to give it another shot.

He is now gunning to be the youngest Singaporean to summit the world's tallest mountain via the less popular North Ridge route from Tibet next year.

"The camps are higher and more exposed on the northern side, so the conditions may be tougher. But I've already been through this experience (from Nepal), so I think (making the second attempt) will be a richer experience," said Mr Tong at a media conference hosted by Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and the National Institute of Education (NIE), which helped the team raise more than \$150,000 to fund their expedition in May.

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The NTU graduate quit his job as a team-building programme facilitator last week (June 14) to focus on training and raising funds for next year's Everest bid. Fewer than five Singaporeans are believed to have conquered Everest via the North Ridge route, with pilot Felix Tan successfully doing so last May.

The NTU-NIE Everest Team Singapore, which was in Nepal in late March, had aimed to be the first multi-racial team from Singapore to summit the 8,848m Mt Everest.

Of the three team members, only Ms Yusrina succeeded in reaching the summit, becoming the first Malay-Muslim woman from Singapore to do so. It was her second attempt after an earthquake in 2015 caused an avalanche which forced her to turn back.

Ms Yusrina said she had to overcome memories of the 2015 Everest avalanche which claimed at least 19 lives.

"Before I left Singapore, I was very anxious, and had nightmares about the earthquake and avalanche," recalled Ms Yusrina, who is pursuing a postgraduate diploma in physical education at NIE.

Even looking at Pumori from the base camp - the mountain where the 2015 avalanche had occurred - made her fearful. "I told myself not to look at it, and after climbing towards the mountain I slowly overcame the sense of fear," said Ms Yusrina.

There were other situations when she thought she was "going to die", including a moment when she was thrown off the mountain while making the climb down from the summit.

While falling, a climber from a different team had tugged on the safety rope that Ms Yusrina was holding on to. Thankfully, the Singaporean was secured by another piece of rope, and landed unscathed.

Dr Saravana, an NIE teaching fellow, climbed to an altitude of at least 6,000m and reached Everest Base Camp. But he did not attempt the push to the summit because of frostbite on his fingers.

And a bad fall had caused him to suffer from spasms and a wrenching pain on his left leg that kept him up at night.

"(The experiences are) painful, but it adds on to your resilience and eventually strengthens you," said Dr Saravana.

The team will visit schools to speak about their experiences during the Everest expedition in the months ahead, and hope that this can inspire youths to lead active lifestyles and take an interest in the outdoors.

"Conditions in the outdoors can be very volatile and require tenacity and resolve, but this can also send out a message to youths that trials and tribulations are part and parcel of life," added Dr Saravana.