

Antarctic trip once in a lifetime experience

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KOTA KINABALU: Not many people would relish a holiday at the Antarctic but for scientists the likes of associate professor Dr Baba Musta going to the earth's southernmost continent is an experience of a lifetime.

Baba who hailed from Tawau, is presently attached with Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) as one of the university's associate professor in the field of geology.

He was selected as one of the two university lecturers to take part in a three month long scientific expedition under the Academy of Science Malaysia (ASM) Malaysian Antarctic Research programme (MARP).

According to Baba, the expedition took place in December 2005, which was a summer month in the continent.

"We sailed on a ship across the Indian ocean to the Maitri Station, an Indian station located at the Schimarcher Oasis, east of Antarctica," he said.

He added that the experience sailing across the ocean was one of the worst he encountered during the whole expedition.

"The sea was very turbulent. Many of our explorers suffered badly during that 10 day sailing period," he said.

Fortunately, they arrived at the station during the summer months as this allowed them to collect samples and conduct their researches.

"We were able to because the polar ice was melting," he said.

He added that in winter

periods, the polar ice is thicker and this poses difficulties for the scientists to collect samples.

"In addition, we also had to undergo strong winds condition and blizzards. Fortunately, they have what is similar to the meteorological department here, which warns us of any strong winds condition," he said.

Baba also elaborated that Antarctica has some of the oldest rocks on earth from the Precambrian period.

"That's about 720 million years ago," he said.

He added that in Malaysia, rocks that old are no longer available due to the extreme weathering process that occurs in the tropics.

He also said that other difference between the Antarctic and Malaysia is that the former lacks soil, thus limiting the number of life forms the continent.

At the same time, Baba was also asked his opinion on the connection between the flood occurrences in Malaysia to the ice melts at the Antarctic.

He added that several of the Indian glaciologists worked at the same station when he was there, and that they have linked global warming to the melting of ice at the region.

"They are there every year to conduct their studies, and they have found that the glacier is still melting at the continent. In the short term, we can't see the effect so much, but maybe in 60 or 70 years to come, the beach border will be moving upland, which means there would be less land," he said.