

Headline	Running hot and cold towards ending AIDS		
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Running hot and cold towards ending AIDS

IT was an ambitious mission when two young Malaysian runners and advocates of the Malaysian AIDS Foundation (MAF) Red Ribbon Youth Club converged and battled heat stroke and frostbite to inspire young Malaysians in the fight to end AIDS.

Club advocates Jerry Song and Jeff Lau embarked on a mission to compete in two of the world's toughest footraces — the 4 Deserts Gobi March China and the 9th 6633 Arctic Ultra respectively— as part of the MAF's Hot and Cold Ultra Challenge 2017.

“I still find it hard to believe that just a few weeks ago, I was racing through tricky sand dunes, mountain passes, dense forests, and of course, the vast, arid Gobi Desert,” said 21-year-old Song, who is a third-year medical student at the University of Malaya. He admitted to having had to juggle his training schedule with his studies.

Widely recognised as the most prestigious outdoor footrace series in the world, the 250km seven-day, six-stage Gobi March combines a cool weather mountain trail and a hot desert race along the Ancient Silk Road in the Xinjiang

province in Northwest China.

Upon accomplishing the mission, Song became the youngest Malaysian to complete the 4 Deserts Gobi March.

Meanwhile, 26-year-old seasoned marathon runner Lau — with two

Marathon des Sables under his belt — took part in the 6633 Arctic Ultra race covering a staggering distance of 563km across the unforgiving Canadian Arctic Circle's frozen landscape with a temperature that dropped to minus 50°C.

Although Lau kicked off the race strong, his Arctic adventure was short-lived as he was stopped at the first leg of the race when he lost two compulsory items, a bivvy bag and a sleeping mat, which were carried off by strong winds.

Despite being disqualified, Lau was the first Malaysian to compete in the 6633 Arctic Ultra race.

In its quest to inspire more young Malaysians to fight against AIDS, MAF in partnership with UM's Faculty of Medicine recently organised a charity run dubbed Hot and Cold Charity Run 2017 which drew 1,700 runners in three race categories — 3km, 5km and 10km — around UM's main campus.

MAF chairman and the university's Faculty of Medicine dean Prof Datuk Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman said young people, aged between 13 and 29, account for over one-third of annual new HIV infections, and they continue to be at risk due to the rise in sexual transmission of HIV.

“The situation is alarming and calls for greater youth leadership and empowerment.”

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Lau (front row, left) and Song (front row, right) lead the 10km run at the Hot & Cold Charity Run 2017.