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Facebook finds missing skier

PARIS - A TEENAGE skier from the Nepalese national team who went missing while training in the Alps has been found wandering the streets of Paris thanks to a Facebook campaign, his team said on Monday.

'The teenager had been living rough after walking several hundred kilometres across France surviving through the kindness of local people,' said a statement from team secretary Ben Campbell.

Uttam Rayamajhi, 17, quit the team's training base at Les Arcs, southeast France, on May 3, upset over a funding row that threatened the future of his country's ski team.

Mr Rayamajhi speaks neither French nor English, had no money, no mobile phone and no experience of big cities, Richard Morley, a former team coach who has been overseeing the squad in the Alps, said after his disappearance.

He was stopped at routine police checks several times as he wandered through France but was never detained as his visa was valid, Mr Campbell's team statement said.

'Eventually a stranger near the Bastille (area of Paris) alerted him to the Facebook campaign and showed him the news on the Internet,' it added.

The campaign on the social networking website was the brainchild of French student Tom Baraize who met the Nepal team at the recent World Alpine Ski Championships in the French Alps, where he acted as their liaison officer.

Over 400 friends and well-wishers joined the campaign in less than a week to bring public attention to the search, said the team statement.

Trainer Richard Morley was contacted and made the trip from the Alps to collect Uttam from the Eiffel Tower where they arranged to meet.

'Uttam agreed to return to the team base when he learnt that his disappearance was jeopardising the funding and participation of team-mate Shyam Dhakal at the forthcoming Vancouver Winter Olympics,' said the team. -- AFP

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