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Channel-Hero

MALAYSIAN INTENDS TO SWIM CROSS-CHANNEL TO FRANCE

By: Wan A. Hulaimi

LONDON, May 8 (Bernama) -- Talking to Abdul Malik Mydin, 27, former bodyguard, former racing cyclist from Butterworth, Penang, it is easy to form an impression that he relishes a challenge.

We were in Hyde Park, walking along the Serpentine lake as the spring drizzle sent an assorted number of promenaders scurrying for cover.

When told that a body of men assemble here in the cold of every winter for a dive in the Serpentine, his eyes lit up as he asked, "How can I join?"

But his eyes were set across a greater body of water which he would see for the first time on Friday afternoon when he arrives in the coastal town of Dover in the south east.

Channel ferries cross these waters regularly to Calais, but Abdul Malik intends to get there by sheer resilience and muscle power; he intends to get to France by swimming across.

Many men - and women - have of course swum across this waterway, but Abdul Malik still intends to be the first. The first Malaysian, the first Southeast Asian most definitely, and maybe the third or fourth Asian to do so.

In 1980 when he was just 7 he saw a fellow villager - a man named Ah Mo Kian - swim from Batu Maung to Butterworth, the first Malaysian to do so. This set the clock of his ambition ticking.

"From then on I just wanted to do the same," he said.

Abdul Malik is, by confession, just a "kampung swimmer"; but although short on credentials he had done remarkably well for himself.

He took to the water seriously in 1999 in the charity swim for Kosovo. Then, without prior training, he swam from Padang Kota to the North Terminal in Butterworth, a distance of 7.8 kilometres.

It was from there that he got his confidence really boosted and launched the English Channel Project in 1999.

He began to take a more technical approach to his swimming, speaking now in terms of heavy and light water, a managed diet, and body mass.

It was not an altogether surprising development: for two and a half years he was trained by a South African coach Liebenburg, but the money soon ran out.

In November last year he made an appeal to the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to get his blessings for his project to swim to further shores.

That opened many doors of sponsorship for him.

The Bukhari Foundation offered him funds to finance his project, then came ABI Construction, then Fila Corporation.

Last October he went for a bigger challenge, and swam from Kuala Perlis to Langkawi, a distance of about 48 kilometres.

At 27, Abdul Malik is looking for greater challenges when other men are looking for a quieter, more secure life.

Earlier in his sporting career he had given up his job as a bodyguard to become a racing cyclist.

He won the silver medal in the Sukma individual road race in 1994 and was part of the gold medal winning Team Time Trial.

In the following year he slipped a notch and took the bronze medal in the Sukma road race in Pahang. Then in 1997 he won fifth place in the Tour Azerbaijan in Iran.

An untutored swimmer who has gone on to great lengths, a former bodyguard who is unusually reticent about his background in the martial arts, a quiet, unassuming man with tremendous self-confidence.

What things crossed his mind during his long, quiet, solitary struggle as a

long distance swimmer?

"It's all work with very little time to think. But whenever I can I always do the zikr [invocations of God's glory]," he said. Now his arrival in London in the chilly spray of the spring weather was his preliminary step towards Dover.

"I am meeting Allison Streeter Friday evening to ask for advice and to ask her if she'd be my trainer," he said.

Allison Streeter, a formidable name, Queen of the Channel, and currency trader who had done 40 Channel crossings in 40 years, the first at the age of 18.

She is also the only woman to have swum the Channel three ways non-stop in 34 hours and 40 minutes.

When contacted, Streeter was cautious about Abdul Malik's prospects, but promised him training facilities in the local pool and in Dover harbour.

On the first Saturday of May a group of swimmers will gather for their annual meet at the harbour and it will be there that Abdul Malik will show his mettle.

Streeter, a member of the Channel Swimmers and Piloting Association, clocked her best crossing at 8 hours 48 minutes. Abdul Malik's target is more modest.

"I hope to cross the Channel in the summer of 2003, and I hope to do it within 10 hours," he said.

-- BERNAMA  
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