

Swimmer in final training for challenge

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KUALA LUMPUR: Marathon swimmer Abdul Malik Mydin left yesterday evening for Melbourne, Australia for his final phase of training before his attempt to swim across the English Channel.

Abdul Malik, from Penang, will undergo a three-week acclimatisation training under coach John van Wisse in Melbourne.

Speaking to reporters at a press conference here, he was upbeat about his attempt to swim the 32.8km channel on July 18.

"This is the oldest channel in the world and a swimmer would not have accomplished much in marathon swimming if he does not swim across it," said the 28-year-old businessman.

Abdul Malik, who took just 14 hours to swim 48km from Kuala Perlis to Kuah, Langkawi, on May 25, said he was 80% prepared for the attempt, which would be the first by a Malaysian.

"I know this is no easy swim and I simply want to do my best at conquering the English Channel. I hope to have the support of fellow Malaysians and if I am successful, I feel I would have done a service for my country," he said, adding that he wanted to accomplish his swim in 18 hours.

To a question, Abdul Malik said he was mentally and physically prepared for the challenge because he had been training for the last three years in both cold and warm waters.

Abdul Malik said that in the past 128 years, less than 600 people had successfully swum across the channel's cold waters where the temperature ranged between 14°C and 18°C.

Matthew Webb first swam the channel in 1875 and his crossing took 21 hours and 45 minutes while in 1926, American Cetrude Ederlev became the first woman to swim the channel, in a then-world record time of 14 hours and 39 minutes.

Besides the cold water, the other challenges Abdul Malik will face are jellyfish, currents and big waves. He will be flagged off in Dover, England, and will head for Cap Gris Nez in Calais, France.

Abdul Malik will wear only normal swimming trunks for the English Channel crossing because wetsuits are disallowed.

Past successes by Abdul Malik include emerging fifth among 22 international swim-

mers in a 26km race across Lake Zurich in Switzerland in August last year.

He had also swum between Penang and the mainland a few times, covering distances of 7.8km to 12km, and 18km from Pulau Besar to Mersing in Johor.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Di Mahathir Mohamad is the patron for the swim, which is billed as the English Channel Challenge 2003 and Yayasan Al Bukhary sponsors it.

Also present at the press conference was vice-chairman of the foundation, Datuk Ismail Yusof, who said RM1.6mil had been spent on Abdul Malik.

"With Abdul Malik, we want the nation to witness another world-class achievement," he said.