

Rousing welcome for English Channel conqueror

BY AUDREY EDWARDS

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SEPANG: Marathon swimmer Abdul Malik Mydin arrived home to a rousing welcome at the KL International Airport yesterday after his historic feat to become the first Malaysian to swim the English Channel.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Di

Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi were among 1,000 well-wishers to welcome and congratulate Abdul Malik, who arrived on a Malaysian Airlines flight from London.

Others who turned up to greet him included Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein, his

deputy Datuk Ong Tee Keat, and sailor Datuk Azhar Mansur, who accomplished a solo maritime circumnavigation of the world in 1999.

Abdul Malik, 28, also became the first South-East Asian to cross the 32.8km-wide waterway that separates England and France, completing his

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swim in 17 hours and 42 minutes on Aug 4.

The crowd burst out in cheers of "*Hidup Malik*" and "*Malaysia Boleh*" as he gave a speech to thank Malaysians for their prayers and support to help him achieve his dream.

They also belted out the *Jalur Gemilang* song at the welcoming reception, which also included speeches from the leaders and an exchange of souvenirs.

The crowd also held banners, proclaiming Abdul Malik *Wira Negara* (Abdul Malik National Hero), *Syabas Malik* (Congratulations Malik) and *Selat fnggeris Telah Ditakluk*

(English Channel Conquered).

Earlier, the channel conqueror was greeted by his family at the airport's VIP room.

Dr Mahathir gave Abdul Malik a silver *keris* while the swimmer returned the gesture with a portrait of him posing with the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister also extended his personal congratulations to Abdul Malik for bringing pride to the country.

Dr Mahathir, who had given his support for the record-breaking attempt over the past three years, said in his speech that Malaysians could stand tall because of Abdul Malik's success.

"We can be proud of his

achievement because of his ability and spirit. We can do anything. He will be an example for all of us.

"The younger generation must instil discipline, perseverance and patience in trying to achieve whatever they aspire for," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians need to be bolder in facing new challenges, such as becoming the country's first astronaut.

Abdul Malik told the crowd: "The last 5km took me five hours. I had no energy left but your prayers kept me going."

He said his endeavour taught him to be patient, adding that sincerity was the key to a person's success.