

08 AUG 2003

Malik-Arrival

ABDUL MALIK RECEIVES HERO'S WELCOME AFTER CHANNEL FEAT

SEPANG, Aug 8 (Bernama) -- English channel conqueror Abdul Malik Mydin arrived home to an arousing welcome today following his historic feat in being the first Malaysian to swim across the waterway which separates England and France last Monday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was at the KL International Airport (KLIA) here to personally welcome and congratulate Abdul Malik, who arrived on board a Malaysian Airlines (MAS) flight from London.

The cavernous airport resounded with a thunderous shout of "Malaysia Boleh" as the marathon swimmer was greeted and applauded by some 1,000 well wishers and supporters.

Joining Dr Mahathir were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, his deputy, Datuk Ong Tee Kiat, sailor Datuk Azhar Mansur, who accomplished a solo circumnavigation of the world in 1999.

The Prime Minister himself had just landed at the KLIA after a one-day visit to Sabah.

Battling powerful current, the Malaysian finished the swim from Dover, England to the beach of the village of Wissant in France in 17 hours 30 minutes.

"Because of Malik, I'm standing here taller than usual. We can be proud of the ability of our local boys," said Dr Mahathir, greeted with enthusiastic applause.

Dr Mahathir said that it was the kind of spirit and determination shown by Abdul Malik that would make Malaysians great.

The younger generation, he said, should emulate the qualities like determination, discipline, diligence and perseverance displayed by Abdul Malik.

The Prime Minister said that even though Abdul Malik had been told that the schedule for the swim had to be changed several times, the pressure he underwent had not eroded his spirit.

"We need young people with the qualities and attitude possessed by Malik Mydin," he said, saying that such positive values should be emulated.

Malaysians had travelled round the world, climb Mount Everest and tried various feats, the Prime Minister said, but there would be yet another challenge to test their resilience and determination.

"We'll be sending a cosmonaut to space. This is not something simple as training will take up to two years and the tests carried out are very challenging.

"But to be a race of dignity and to be respected, then we'll have to have determination, discipline and be prepared to face future challenges," he said.

However, Dr Mahathir believed that many Malaysians would offer themselves to become the country's first cosmonaut.

He said that through courage and high spirit, the challenge to send a cosmonaut to outer space would become a reality.

"Indeed, it's true that many others have travelled to outer space and even landed on the moon but for us, it's something very challenging," he said.

The Prime Minister said that not many in the developing world would have such an opportunity and as such, the people should be grateful for the

opportunity to test Malaysians in facing the challenge of this modern world.

Dr Mahathir congratulated Abdul Malik personally and on behalf of the Malaysian government for making a name for the country.

"Malaysia boleh, rakyat Malaysia boleh (Malaysia can, Malaysians can). If you are willing, you can, overcome everything. InsyaAllah," he said.

In his speech, Abdul Malik thanked all Malaysians and the country's leaders for their encouragement, support and prayers.

Briefly relating his experience in swimming across the English Channel, Abdul Malik said that he took about five hours to swim the last five-kilometre stretch.

"If you ask me, I'll say I didn't have any more strength at that time but because of your prayers, that of the Rt Honourable Prime Minister, friends and all Malaysians, I was able to set foot in Calais," he said.

He described his success as not his alone but also that of all Malaysians.

At the function, Abdul Malik was presented with a keris by Dr Mahathir while Abdul Malik presented him a portrait of himself with the Prime Minister in return.

-- BERNAMA

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