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Sports-Channel (PM)

PM NOT REGRETTING CHANNEL CHALLENGE DELAY

By: Asan Ahmad

DOVER (England), July 29 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has no regrets over delays to Malaysian marathon swimmer Abdul Malik Mydin's attempt to conquer the English Channel.

Instead Dr Mahathir, patron of the English Channel Challenge, advised Malik to remain patient and wait for the best time and weather to swim the 32.8km of the world's most challenging channel.

The Prime Minister's message, faxed to Abdul Malik care of the Malaysian High Commissioner's office here yesterday, was handed to him at about 2.30pm (9.30pm Malaysian time).

In the three paragraph message, Dr Mahathir also reminded Abdul Malik to heed the decision of his coach, John van Wisse, on the swim.

The Prime Minister wrote: "I am not disappointed with delays in setting a date for the English Channel Swim. It is better to swim when John confirms that the weather in the channel is suitable. I will always pray that Abdul Malik will succeed."

The message is the second from Dr Mahathir, the first being on July 22.

The 28-year-old swimmer has also received messages of support from the King and Queen and the Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"I am very grateful for the concern shown by leaders on the challenge, and I promise to fullfil the mission. Their concern is an added boost for me to conquer the channel," he said.

Abdul Malik's attempt to swim from Dover to Calais, France, was originally scheduled for July 23 but it has since been postponed several times due to bad weather.

The channel was first opened to crossing attempts from July 17-27 and will again be open from Aug 4-14. However, the Channel Swimming and Piloting Federation (CSPF) has allowed Abdul Malik the chance to attempt the swim at any time once the weather clears.

Meanwhile, a group of 13 Malaysian journalists and the English Channel Challenge secretariat's chief coordinator, Datuk Talaat Husain, rode on board a commercial ferry here yesterday to get the feel of channel's conditions.

Throughout the one-and-a-half hour journey to Calais, the journalists experienced for themselves the strong winds and rough waves on the channel.

"You feel it now...how strong the wind is and if you look at the channel there, the waves are as high as two to three meters and this is why the CSPF refused to give Malik the green light to cross," said Talaat, who briefed journalists on the open deck of the ferry.

Talaat also took journalists to the spot where Abdul Malik is expected to complete the swim, Cap Gris Nez bay, about 40 minutes' drive from the Port of Calais.

-- BERNAMA

AHA HM EMK SRI