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Congrats, Dr M tells Channel swimmer

By Zaharah Othman

WHEN 20-year-old Lennard Lee (picture) spoke of his plan to conquer the English Channel, it was greeted with some nonchalance.

Now there is only admiration for the second-year medical student who became the second Malaysian to cross the 33.6km channel on Tuesday - and in good time, too.

His time of nine hours and 45 minutes was a huge improvement over the 17 hours 35 minutes taken by Datuk Abdul Malik Mydin in August last year.

Not surprising then that the accolades have started flowing. When Lennard woke up yesterday morning, he was greeted by a note of congratulations from former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"I am proud and every Malaysian must also be proud of your achievement. Just goes to show what Malaysians can do when they set their minds on any challenge. Malaysia obviously Boleh, and you certainly Boleh - keep it up!"

The note was faxed to his father Dr Lee Siow Ming, a scientist at the University College London, from the former PM's office.

A message of congratulations was also received from the Youth and Sports Ministry. Lee and his family are looking forward to meeting Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi next weekend when the Prime Minister meets the Malaysian community during his visit to Britain.

"I am just overwhelmed and excited that people are giving me the support," said Lee, still resting at a caravan site overlooking the Channel.

Lennard raised STG1,500 (RM9,750) for charities in Malaysia as well as in the UK, and plans to do more more swims for charity.

"Once Lennard has something on his mind, he will not rest," said Dr Lee.

And his strong will is something other members of the clan in Malacca can attest to.

In Malacca, Tan Choe Choe reports Lennard's uncle Dr Lee Yew Ming, a heart surgeon at a private hospital there, as saying that his nephew had always been adventurous.

"He was never one to back down from any difficult task. Just last year, he cycled with his younger brother Julian, who was then about 16, from Bangkok to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam in just under one month," he said.

Some of the money raised during the Channel crossing will go to the Seck Kia Eenh Temple's Cancer Fund here.

"He wanted to raise funds for cancer foundations because I think he has learnt from his father how debilitating and devastating the disease can be," said Yew Ming.

Meanwhile, Malacca Youth and Sports Exco Datuk R. Raghavan said the State Government only learned of Lennard's feat today and said the State Sports Council would discuss the best way to reward him.

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