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Here and out there

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HERE'S a brief of some of the happenings in Malaysia and abroad, between May 20 and May 27. If you missed reading the dailies this week, this is your chance to get updated.

MALAYSIA

Marathon swim to Langkawi

* ABDUL Malik Mydin became the first Malaysian to swim a distance of 48km from Kuala Perlis to Kuah, Langkawi. Swimming in a specially built cage to protect him from being stung by jellyfish, the 28-year-old former gold medallist in cycling for the 1994 Malaysia Games, clocked a time of 14 hours, three minutes and 13 seconds.

The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who flagged him off from Kuala Perlis, was also present at the Kuah jetty to receive him when he arrived at 11.48am, four hours earlier than expected.

Abdul Malik undertook this feat as part of preparations to become the first Malaysian to swim across the English Channel from Dover, England to Cap Gris Nez, France, a distance of 32.8km, in August.

Computers for all teachers by 2009

* BLACKBOARDS and chalks or slide projectors will not be the only teaching equipment available to teachers in the future. The Government will spend RM800 million annually to purchase modern teaching equipment and facilities for all schools.

This includes laptops/personal computers to be provided to all 270,000 teachers in the country in the next six years. Already 27,000 teachers have been equipped with laptops to assist them in teaching subjects such as Science and Mathematics in English.

SINGAPORE

Fuel cell-driven cars to be tested

* THE Lion City has plans to be the first in the region to have cars powered by hydrogen fuel cells and open hydrogen refuelling stations to keep them running.

By next year, petroleum company BP and Air Products, an American supplier of industrial gases, plans to open these stations while DaimlerChrysler, an automaker, will bring seven fuel-cell vehicles for testing in Singapore.

Fuel cell-driven cars are powered by compressed hydrogen which emits no pollutants. The cost of these cars or the stations however aren't cheap. A hydrogen fuel vehicle costs between US\$1 million (RM3.8 million) and US\$2 million. Building the stations on the other hand, costs US\$500,000 to US\$1 million each.

INDIA

Student bride rejects dowry demand

* A DOWRY or gifts of cash and goods is still common practice in Indian marriages, even though it is banned by law and considered an offence. The family of a bride would (often) succumb to the exorbitant dowry demands of a groom and his family or risk having the marriage called off.

But Nisha Sharma, a 21-year-old software engineering student, decided to take matters into her own hands when she was faced with a similar prospect. Her groom wanted a dowry of 1.2 million rupees (RM97,000) from her just hours before their wedding.

Nisha scrapped the wedding and lodged a police report that landed the groom in jail. Nisha has been hailed as a heroine by many Indian women.

THAILAND

Roach rites

* THE Madagascan Giant Hissing Cockroach was immensely popular as a pet among the people of Bangkok in 2002. The insect measures 10cm in length, can't fly, has a lifespan of seven years and emits a hissing sound that acts as a defence mechanism against predators.

But health officials saw it as a health hazard that could spread diseases like typhoid and diarrhoea and subsequently banned it. About 1,000 of these giant cockroaches were confiscated (and killed) when the ban took effect. A traditional Buddhist funeral rite has been planned for the roaches to please their former owners.

UNITED STATES

Napster rises again?

* AT its peak, Napster was the most popular online music site with an estimated 70 million users. That was before it went bankrupt due to legal action taken by various parties of the music industry which accused it of encouraging the spread of music piracy.

Roxio, a music software firm which had acquired Napster's assets upon bankruptcy, is planning to revive it by purchasing Pressplay, which is an online music venture between Universal Music Group and Sony Music Entertainment.

The deal is worth US\$39.5 million (RM150.1 million). If everything goes as planned, Roxio will have a legal digital music distribution infrastructure and catalog with the involvement of all five major music labels.