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Malik returns to hero's welcome at KLIA, thanks Malaysians

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SEPANG, Fri. - Marathon swimmer extraordinaire Abdul Malik Mydin attributed his success in swimming across the English Channel to the prayers of fellow Malaysians.

He said the last five kilometres before reaching the shore of Cap Gris Nez in Calais, France, were the most difficult. "The wind and currents were very strong and I had no energy left.

"Nevertheless, I made it due to your prayers," he said on returning to a hero's welcome at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport today.

He was only scheduled to touch down from London at 5.30pm but hundreds of fans, well-wishers and relatives were waiting with banners, bunga manggar and bouquets to welcome him from as early as 4pm.

Malik was first received by Deputy Youth and Sport Minister Datuk Ong Tee Kiat, deputy secretary-general of the ministry Datuk Talaat Husain and director-general of the National Sports and Youth Department Datuk Raja Ruslan Raja Samah.

He was then received by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Abdullah Badawi and Youth and Sport Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who arrived from a visit to Sabah, later met the swimmer and addressed the crowd.

Dr Mahathir said: "Because of Malik, I am standing taller than usual. We can be proud of the ability of our boys," he said to screams from the crowd.

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

He said the younger generation should view Malik as a role model. "Malik was under tremendous pressure before the swim because the schedule was changed several times. But that did not dampen his spirits. We need more young people with such qualities," he said.

"Malaysians can do anything if they have the will. They have travelled solo round the world, climbed Mount Everest and tried various feats. There is yet another challenge to test our resilience and determination. We are going to send a cosmonaut to space. This is not going to be an easy task. Training will take several years and challenging tests await the candidate."

"We must have the determination and discipline to face the challenges if we want people to respect us," he said.

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

"Of course, many people from the developed countries have travelled to outer space but for us, it's something new and 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.

Dr Mahathir praised Malik on behalf of the Government, saying: "Malaysia Boleh, rakyat Malaysia Boleh. If there is a will, we can do anything."

Hishammuddin later said at a Press conference that Malik's achievement was more than swimming across the English Channel. "It has a much deeper meaning, it shows the youth of today that with perseverance and hard work they can accomplish anything."

Malik thanked Malaysians and the leaders for their support and prayers.

He said the feat was not merely a sport but had taught him the meaning of life. "If you want something you must be sincere and have patience."

His immediate plan is to get a complete rest before embarking on another project. He said he had yet to decide on what he wanted to do next.

Malik said he was prepared to coach young swimmers.

Malik was later presented with a keris by Dr Mahathir and in return, Malik presented the Prime Minister with a portrait of the leader.

Also present to greet Malik was Deputy Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Khalid Yunus and Datuk Azhar Mansor, who had sailed solo around the world.