

05/08/2003

Malik: This is for Dr M

Zaharah Othman

"I DEDICATE this swim to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as a gift before his retirement," said Abdul Malik Mydin after his historic 18-hour swim across the English Channel yesterday.

The Prime Minister made calls to the pilot boat to monitor Malik's progress as well as to give him moral support.

During the long wait following several postponements due to bad weather, the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein kept his spirits up with calls of support.

Malik reached the shore of Cap Gris Nez in Calais, France, to become the first Malaysian to swim across the channel.

He arrived at 8.42pm French time (7.42pm British time, 2.42am yesterday Malaysian time), in just under 18 hours.

Emerging from the pilot boat that took him to Dover in four hours from Wissant Beach in Calais where he made the momentous touchdown, Malik said he was grateful for the support and prayers of everyone.

He reached the beach of the village of Wissant, 5km from Cap Gris Nez, where he was originally expected to land. Strong winds and currents during the last 7km made it a real struggle against the currents.

On his arrival, 30 supporters from Paris and London greeted him with flags and banners. Back in Dover, supporters who had arrived in a convoy received the news from Mariam Ahmad, an official from the Ministry of Youth and Sports, who crossed over to Wissant and was one of those who witnessed the start as well as the finish.

At 7.42pm British time, shouts of Malaysia Boleh rang simultaneously from both sides of the channel.

Phone calls and SMS messages were sent and received as the good news spread.

"Because he was taken way off course, we had to run along the beach. But at that very moment, I felt very moved," said Mariam.

Malik had the company of coach John van Wisse, foster father Mohd Nasir Majid, trainer and mentor Frieda Streeter and public relations officer Rahayu Ahmad from the Aegean Blue, the pilot boat navigated by Mike Oram.

He was greeted by wellwishers who had been waiting from 6pm. Among them was Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports Datuk Ong Tee Keat, who came from Birmingham after the Badminton World Championships.

"As a Malaysian, I am proud to share the achievement of the man who managed to cross the English Channel. I believe many Malaysians will follow in his footsteps, in the spirit of Malaysia Boleh," said Ong.

Said van Wisse: "Malik had had a good day to start with. He was ahead of time but he missed the point at Calais. After that, we had to just keep him focused and his spirits up.

"He did very well considering the strong currents in the later part of the swim. But it really showed his real character to be able to stay that long in water in those conditions. It is just amazing."

Before heading back to his hotel for a well-earned rest, a brief doa selamat was held at the Dover Marina.