

Pipes finally reach Gaza
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By Alang Bendahara

KUALA LUMPUR: Palestinians in Gaza have finally received the much-needed plastic PVC pipes from Malaysia to rebuild their damaged sewage system. This means the mission of the Spirit of Rachel Corrie -- sponsored by the Malaysian Perdana Global Peace Foundation (PGPF) -- has been accomplished.

The mission began when MV Finch, a cargo vessel, left the Port of Piraeus, Greece, on May 11 carrying the PVC pipes with a total length of 7.5km.

On Thursday, more than two months later, trailers carrying the 32-tonne pipes were received by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) representative at the Gaza-Israeli border of Karem Shalom.

Perdana Global Peace Foundation (PGPF) chairman Tan Sri Norian Mai said he was informed that the cargo was received intact and not a single pipe, joint or connector was missing.

"We are very grateful for this news as it means all the Spirit of Rachel Corrie's mission objectives have finally been achieved," said Norian yesterday.

He said the PRCS was now in custody of the pipes and discussions would be held soon on plans to use it to repair the damaged sewage pipes in Gaza.

"We hope that this contribution from donations given to PGPF may help to rebuild, although not all, but part of the damaged sewage system in Gaza."

With the successful delivery of the cargo, the New Straits Times will release an exclusive video footage of a May 16 attack by a navy ship of the Israeli Defence Forces on MV Finch, which carried the pipe cargo.

The video was recorded by NST reporter Alang Bendahara, who was onboard the Finch as part of the 12 people comprising crewmen, humanitarian activists and media personnel.

It was the only recorded video footage of the attack. The two-month delay in releasing the video was to ensure the safe return of all 12 people of the mission to their countries and safe delivery of the cargo to the Palestinians.

The five minute-edited version of the original 18 minute, 26 second footage is available for viewing today at www.nst.com.my by clicking on NST TV.

On board the MV Finch were anti-war activists and journalists consisting of seven Malaysians, two Irish, two Indians and one Canadian.

On May 16, the ship entered Palestinian waters and was just 900m from land when it came under attack from the Israeli navy.

After coming under gunfire, the ship was forced to divert to Egyptian waters; and later on the same day, anchored off El Arish Port where it remained for seven weeks waiting for permission to dock.

During those long weeks, numerous negotiations and meetings were held between the Malaysian Foreign Affairs Ministry and its Egyptian counterpart, but no solution was found to deliver the cargo to Gaza.

The mission members were "imprisoned" on the ship with limited water and food supply, an incident that attracted media coverage worldwide.

The impasse finally ended after PGPF president Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad met Egyptian Prime Minister Dr Essam Sharaf on June 29 in Cairo.

The ship was only allowed to berth at El Arish Port on July 5 at 7.10pm (Egypt time) to unload the pipes, which took almost four hours.

The pipes were eventually transferred to seven trailers.

The cargo was then taken to Ouja at the Israeli border, where it was reassigned to other trailers sponsored by the Palestinians to be taken to Gaza via Karem Shalom.

This humanitarian initiative was sponsored by the PGPF, whose founder and president is Dr Mahathir.

Its two objectives were to break the illegal siege of Gaza by the Tel Aviv regime, in place since 2007, and to deliver the PVC pipes to the Palestinians.

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