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Aiming to be first Malaysian to sail around the world solo

LANGKAWI, Sun. - Out in the open seas where nature still holds sway, and where it takes a special kind of being to beat the elements, one stands between Azhar Mansor and his dream - finance, or rather the lack of it.

The Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition (Lima '97), is where this dream will begin to take shape. It is where he will confront the first element - enlisting the support of local corporate bodies and individuals in his quest to be the first Malaysian to circumnavigate the world solo.

Azhar, 39, who is formerly with the merchant navy estimates that he will need some RM1.7 million for the effort and has spent RM870,000 on his vessel.

"It is in the final stages of being outfitted and I need another RM900,000," he said, adding it was a minimal amount for a round the world effort.

Azhar said he would also need product support for food, clothing, telecommunications and medical equipment.

During Lima'97, Azhar will be at the maritime division in Tanjung Malai to promote his cause.

Azhar can also be contacted at azharmoc@tm.net.my or at 16-1A, Medan Bukit Indah Tiga, Taman Bukit Indah, 68000 Ampang or at Tel: 03-4974832/3.

"It is not just about personal dreams and satisfaction. It is about achieving a name and reputation for the country in a different way," he said.

Azhar is no stranger to the seven seas, having served in the merchant navy between 1977 and 1982 after graduating from the Singapore Polytechnic in Nautical Studies.

"I was there more for the experience," he said adding that he resigned to pursue his first love, yachting, after he felt he had acquired all the necessary navigational skills.

Azhar's first involvement in yachting was through managing marinas, in Penang, Kota Kinabalu and Langkawi.

He was also involved in yacht chartering and often sailed the South China Sea to Sabah and Sarawak ferrying yachts.

His encounters with foreigners who visited the country in their yachts fuelled his own desire to sail the world.

"But I wanted a difference, something deeper and that was why I decided to go solo as this would be the ultimate in yachting," he said adding his wife and three children supported his dream.

He then approached Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to present his case, and received positive response.

"It was an honour for me to receive his blessing and it was a morale booster," he said.

Azhar engaged world renowned boat builders, Sydney-based McConaghy Industries to build his 50-footer ocean racer using advanced composite materials.

The boat itself was designed by another world class Sydney-based firm, Jutson Yacht Design, responsible for designing world record holder for solo circumnavigation in the Class II challenge, David Adams' boat True Blue.

Adams claimed his record from Charleston to Charleston in the East Coast United States in 126 days between 1994 and 1995.

Azhar said his yet to be named yacht would be an improvement on True Blue.

"If I am going to circumnavigate the world, I may as well do it in the best possible way and I will try to beat that record and complete the challenge within 100 days.

"But I have to leave by February so that the weather throughout the journey would be favourable and would not put me at a disadvantage," he said.

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