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Sailor's dream to make solo voyage

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DREAMS are the most difficult to possess. Many times, they elude us. Many times, we fail to realise them. And Azhar Mansor, a sailor who harbours dreams of fame and achievement, is now wondering whether his dreams are also going to fade away.

The 39-year-old former merchant navy has one big ambition - a solo attempt to circumnavigate the world on a yacht. Others have done this before, men and women, all foreign. Azhar's dream is to set sail in February from legendary Langkawi and make it back to the island in record time.

While completing the voyage is one half of the dream, the other is to break the current solo record of 105 days, 20 hours, 31 minutes and 23 seconds.

The lad is confident that this can be done, provided there's sufficient support from everyone.

I asked him whether this is going to be verified. I'm sure we don't want a Malaysian who sailed from Langkawi to Tioman and emerge 100 days later claiming that he has broken the world record. Well, my cynicism was unfounded.

Azhar's voyage will be monitored by the World Sailing Speed Record Council. Backed by satellite tracking, Azhar may be a lone figure on his yacht but all eyes will be on him, sharing his dreams and joining the endeavour.

The father of three who hails from Perlis is merely responding to a call by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, he said when he dropped by at the office last week.

In a simple flag-handing over ceremony to the Malaysia Everest Team in March this year, Dr Mahathir said: "We want our youth to be more ambitious, willing to face challenges and although there is danger, they must be willing to face it in order to be successful. Whether it is the highest, the furthest or the most difficult, we can increase the level of achievements not only for ourselves but also for mankind."

Azhar has called his voyage the '1998 Malaysia Ocean Cross', a premier yachting expedition to circumnavigate the world single-handed and non-stop, covering a distance of over 40,000km. Azhar knows that this is easier said than done, but he is determined to try his best.

He recalled the words of others who made it before him. Pete Goss, a British solo sailor who took part in the 1996-1997 Vendee Globe Race (solo) said: "There are two challenges to be faced by anyone consumed by the desire to sail single-handed around the world - the first challenge is to get to the start line, and the second is to get to the finish."

At this point in time, Azhar is facing the first challenge. He is short of some RM900,000, a figure which can be raised if other Malaysians share the same dream and sense of adventure. Azhar will be at the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition to meet well-wishers.

He is supposed to have his yacht on display at Lima but it is being built and calibrated. But he hopes to have it ready for trial before he sets sail next year. All this time, the words of other solo sailors kept ringing in his ears, as if beckoning and taunting him.

Samantha Brewster, who sailed solo non-stop last year aboard her 67ft yacht named Heath Group, had this to say about her anti-clockwise attempt: "The route takes the sailor southward crossing the vastness of the Indian,

Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, making a complete rounding of the entire Antarctic.

"He will have to pass Cape Horn, southern tip of South America where the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans meet in frequent hostility and the Cape of Good Hope on the southern tip of South Africa - gateway to the notoriously rough and heartless Southern Ocean.

"This is the most desolate region on earth where sailors sailed through the roaring forties and the screaming fifties. Few ships pass through here; land is thousands of miles away, it is cold, friendless and the weather never relaxes."

One should look at Azhar's attempt from the Malaysia Boleh perspective. Nothing is impossible if one puts one's heart and mind into this. Azhar may sail alone, but all Malaysians must join him in this endeavour that made Panglima Hitam aka Henry the Black among the first to join Magellan in his world trip in 1522.

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