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Azhar readies yacht for round-the-globe voyage

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LANGKAWI, Tues. - After 36 hours of rainstorms and near-misses with drift nets at sea, sailor Azhar Mansur succeeded in delivering his high-tech sailing yacht Jalur Gemilang from Port Klang to the Awana Porto Malai Langkawi marina early yesterday morning.

The seasoned seaman, attempting to set a world record by sailing solo around the world using a new route, took delivery of his RM2 million yacht from Sydney in Australia after a few years of deliberation due to insufficient funds.

He sailed alone to Port Klang last week and proceeded to Langkawi where he will be based.

During his voyage, Azhar faced bad weather and the danger of running into drift nets but sharp eyes and years of experience saw him through.

"The yacht has taken a real beating since I sailed with her from Australia. I can't afford any serious damage because this will delay my attempt. The boat has made it so far and it will be refitted here (Langkawi) for its voyage round the world.

"I am particularly concerned about navigating the boat around our shores. There are plenty of unforeseeable dangers such as floating logs but the nastiest thing is the drift nets. They could damage the yacht, which is a nightmare."

Since yesterday, the Jalur Gemilang has been on public display at the Awana Porto Malai Langkawi marina. The yacht, which is the only one of its kind in the country, features state-of-the-art navigational and communication equipment such as high-frequency radios and satellite voice and data uplink.

It was built and designed with endurance and high performance in mind. Space-age materials such as kevlar have been used on this yacht for strength and durability.

For the three-month voyage, more than two tonnes of equipment and food will be carried on board. The yacht is also equipped with a desalinators which is capable of converting five litres per hour of drinking water from the sea.

Azhar's attempt will be closely monitored via satellite by the world maritime record body. An inmarsat-c transmitter on board Jalur Gemilang will provide the Malaysian public with real-time updates on the event's soon-to-be-announced web-site.

"I am making preparations to brief the Prime Minister about my world record attempt. Thanks to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's encouragement, concerned individuals and responsible corporate citizens, this Malaysian challenge is finally taking shape," Azhar said.

"I hope to set sail in December or January when I get the green light to proceed. At the moment, I am making preparations to set up a communication centre where the public can be informed about the progress of this event."

If the attempt is successful, Azhar will go down in history as the first Malaysian to sail solo non-stop around the world.

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