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Lack of fund hampers quest for record-breaking yacht trip

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Sailor Azhar Mansor turned 40 three days ago, but has not even thought of celebrating it.

He has every reason to be unhappy. His plan to set out on a solo round-the-world trip on a yacht tomorrow had to be postponed for lack of cash, despite all the effort, money and time expended for the purpose.

"I am so disappointed," said the father of three, who is determined to circumnavigate the globe in 100 days. The current world record is 105 days.

The voyage which he called "1998 Malaysia Ocean Cross" was meant to be a non-stop expedition covering over 40,000 km.

The expedition was expected to cost RM1.7 million. He had already spent RM870,000, raised through loans, for the construction of the vessel.

He needs about RM500,000 more to complete the yacht.

Azhar had engaged a world-renowned boat builder, Sydney-based McConaghy Industries to build his 50-foot ocean racer using advanced composite material.

The boat itself was designed by another Sydney firm, Jutson Yacht Design.

Nonetheless, Azhar made it clear that his spirit and determination were as strong as ever.

"I am going to make it sooner or later," said Azhar, whose efforts had received the blessing of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself.

For the former merchant navy sailor who graduated in Nautical Studies from Singapore Polytechnic, the attempt is not about personal glory and fame.

"It about making a name for my country," he said.

Azhar said he was thankful to companies and individuals who had contributed or made pledges to his voyage.

Anyone wishing to help Azhar in his endeavour can send contributions to New Straits Times Sdn Bhd, Balai Berita, 31, Jalan Riong, 59100, Kuala Lumpur. They can also call NST assistant news editor Farush Khan at 2823322, ext 462 for information.

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