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PM to launch yacht attempting to set a record

LANGKAWI, Fri. - For Azhar Mansur, who will soon attempt to become the first Malaysian to sail solo around the world, tomorrow's ceremony where Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will "bless" his yacht Jalur Gemilang will usher in the countdown to his journey.

The ceremony at the Awana Porto Malai marina, is an indicator of the strong support which Dr Mahathir and various corporate bodies have given him to embark on the tough 21,600 nautical mile voyage which will begin tentatively between Jan 25 and 30 after the fasting month.

This show of support is also a source of inspiration for the hardy seaman to achieve his dream and show the 'Malaysia Boleh' spirit.

At the marina yesterday, Azhar was busy cleaning his RM2 million hi-tech yacht which has been refitted after his gruelling 5,000 nautical mile journey to Malaysian waters.

While his immediate focus was on the blessing and official launching ceremony by Dr Mahathir, he was also busy with the other nitty gritty matters for the VIP's visit, such as the shore operations base at the Awana Resort.

This room will be the communication nerve centre while Azhar is at sea. From here, every inch of his progress at sea will be chartered.

The world record attempt will also be monitored via satellite by officials from the United Kingdom-based World Maritime body.

"Besides monitoring my progress at sea, the base will display the inventory, such as equipment, food and clothings I take with me," said Azhar, who has psyched himself for the feat which will make him the first Malaysian to sail solo and non-stop round the globe.

This inventory will be on display for the benefit of yachting enthusiasts and other visitors to the island until he sets sail.

Azhar has also been very busy attending to personal matters which must be sorted out before he leaves.

He is well aware of the dangers to his life while at sea.

"I have to sort out various personal matters for I may not come back," he added.

It was on Dec 3 last year that Azhar was introduced to Dr Mahathir and also the model of the yacht during the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition.

Due to shortage of funds, he had earlier been unable to take delivery of the yacht.

But exactly a year after, his dream has become a reality - the Prime Minister is launching and blessing the yacht.

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