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Sailor Azhar all set to create waves

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PORT KLANG, Sun. - After almost two years of intense planning, a local sailor with vast experience in maritime industry, is almost ready to realise his dream of setting two world records in non-stop round-the-world solo sailing.

Azhar Mansor, 40, arrived at the Royal Selangor Yacht Club today from Sydney after sailing solo for close to 5,000 nautical miles aboard his custom-designed sailing boat named after the national flag Jalur Gemilang.

Azhar who looked tanned, tired and sleepy, had left Sydney on Sept 11 to bring home the six-metre boat which was built to specifications for single-handed sailing by a shipyard in Sydney.

He will sail the boat to its homeport Langkawi in the next few days.

Azhar, a former ocean-going merchant navy officer with the Malaysian International Shipping Corporation, was greeted on arrival by his wife Sarramarria Abdullah and three children Eizzaz, 12, Elliz, nine, and Eizhan, six.

Azhar told reporters on his arrival that within three to four months, he would be ready to start on his voyage of adventure and hardship.

He is attempting to set two world records - as the first to sail non-stop solo on a new route verified by the World Sailing Speed Council and to set a new Open 50 world record.

The world record in that category of 105 days, 20 hours, 31 minutes and 23 seconds is held by a Frenchman.

"Although I am very excited to start on the journey, I need to familiarise myself with the boat and its mechanism first so that I will be ready for any eventuality during my attempt.

"This is a very important part of the project because to qualify for the records, I cannot have anyone else helping me during the whole trip," he said.

Under the WSSC ruling, to qualify as round-the-world sailing, the vessel must start from and return to the same point and it must also cross all meridians of longitude and the equator.

Azhar's attempt will start from Langkawi to the Indian Ocean and back to Langkawi while making a long loop northwards to Recife in Brazil to complete the 21,600 nautical miles required by the WSSC as a circumnavigation.

If he succeeds, Azhar will be the first Malaysian to sail solo and non-stop around the world and will be the first to attempt a new course.

Azhar said he did not foresee any difficulties in sailing round the world alone as he was always comfortable at sea.

"I am used to the sea. In fact I love the peace and the solitude afforded by the sea.

"My main worry is mechanical hitches as this can set me back a few days from my target of finishing the whole trip within three months," he said, adding that the whole project was expected to cost about RM2 million.

Without the personal wealth to start on the venture, Azhar had written to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, explaining the project and asking for his blessings and support, which, after some consideration, was given wholeheartedly.

Initially, the intention was to buy a secondhand boat, but as the likely boats - True Blue, Newcastle Challenge, Thursday's Child and Aqua Quorum - were all sold before sufficient funds were available, it became clear that

they would need to have a new yacht built.
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