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Azhar-Record

AZHAR CROSSES FINISH LINE, FIRST TO CIRCLE THE GLOBE EAST-WEST

LANGKAWI, Aug 11 (Bernama) -- In the midst of huge array of vessel, the national sailing hero Datuk Azhar Mansor glided past the finishing line here tonight to become the first person ever to set a solo east-west circumnavigation record covering more than 25,000 nautical miles.

After setting sail on Feb 2, the attempt by Azhar is the first for circling the globe from the Indian Ocean and ending at Langkawi as previous attempts by mostly Westerner mariners began from the Atlantic Ocean.

Azhar's historic crossing to the finish line between the Star Cruise jetty coastal area and Pulau Intan Besar at 11.39pm was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali and more than 2,000 members of the public.

This was followed by flare, horn and firing of water cannon by the flotila of ship accompanying Azhar.

Also present were Kedah Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid, Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, Air Force Chief Lt Gen Datuk Seri Ahmad Saruji Che Rose and Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) general manager Datuk Abdul Halil Mutalib.

The 17-crew members of the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF), who took part in the airlift mission to deliver a replacement mast to Falklands, were also present.

The two local appointed timekeepers of the World Sailing Speed Record Council representatives also witnessed the crossing and will furnish the official timing of the finish to the council which is based in Britain.

As Azhar proceeded to the Awana Porto Malai marina, his wife Sara Maria Abdullah and their three children Eizaz, 13, Elliz, nine, and Eizhan, seven, and immediate family members were on hand to greet him.

When the RM2 million ocean racer approached to berth at the jetty, adjacent to the Awana Porto Malai resort where Dr Mahathir flagged him off on Feb 2, water cascaded from various points of the jetty.

As soon as Azhar stepped out, he handed over the Jalur Gemilang flag to Dr Mahathir followed by the handing over of Jalur Gemilang official four-wheel drive by Dr Mahathir to Azhar.

This was followed by rendition of "Negaraku" and "Malaysia Berjaya" by 300 youths and schoolchildren.

Earlier, the Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) vessels and marine police patrol boats escorted Azhar and the RM2 million ocean racer Jalur Gemilang to Langkawi shores when he was 20 nautical miles at sea.

A fleet review of vessels also took part in a traditional taking-the salute ritual for Azhar as he got closer to the jetty.

Kangar-born Azhar has completely satisfied the World Sailing Speed Record Council by crossing the imaginary Equator twice on Feb 8 and Aug 5 and its requirement for him to pass five southernmost capes, namely;

*Cape Leeuwin, Australia (March 3)

* South East Cape of Tasmania (March 14)

*South Cape of New Zealand (March 19)

*Cape Horn, South America (April 18); and

*Cape of Good Hope, South Africa on July 9.

The WSSRC has reclassified his voyage as solo round the world, assisted with stops, Eastbound, as he was forced to make a stopover at the Falklands when he sailed into a hailstorm on April 12 that broke the Jalur Gemilang's mast into three pieces.

But to Azhar, it did not bother him.

"Anytime that I finished will be a record for me as this is the first time such an attempt is being recorded," a beaming Azhar said when met in Falklands recently.

It would not worry him so much about the time although previously he was scheduled to make it in a record time of less than 105 days at that to circle the globe.

Since Azhar set off from Langkawi on Feb 2, he has come across several memorable experience which he shared with Malaysians through his daily updates sent to his shore base at the Awana Porto Malai resort here.

The public were also able to comprehend several sailing terms used by all the yachtmen such as hailstorm, gale wind, cold front, knock down, headsea, doldrums, the Roaring Forties and the Screaming Fifties (part of the ocean near the Snares Island, New Zealand because of its gale wind and heavy sea).

Azhar had said that the support and encouragement by fellow Malaysians helped kept him in good spirits when his ocean racer nearly capsized due to gusts of winds on March 30 and heavy damage to his mast which broke into three pieces last April 12.

He also picked up distress call from an experienced round-the-world-solo sailor Isabelle Autissier who reported that her yacht had capsized in the South Pacific near Antarctica and a distress alert about fishing vessel sank off Cape of Good Hope.

Azhar also managed to send a quick recovery message on April 7 to Dr Mahathir who was hospitalised due to lung infection.

Being a human, Azhar has also expressed his feelings of longing for home after he developed a strong desire for local food and the family when he entered his 165th day at sea.

His voyage was disrupted after he sailed into a hailstorm in the Southern Ocean on April 12 when his main mast broke into three pieces, forcing him to take shelter in the Falklands for 31 days while waiting for the Jalur Gemilang's mast to be replaced.

Azhar resumed his voyage from Falklands on May 26.

The RMAF mission to airlift the replacement mast from Australia to the Falklands could be well remembered by all as their efforts to help the Jalur Gemilang has enabled Azhar to resume his journey back home.

The trip was made possible with the help from Gapadu Group of Companies who is providing the fund in making the replacement of the mast possible, and the corporate help should not be forgotten.

The plane left Kuala Lumpur on May 8 to fly the RM150,000 mast from Brisbane, Australia to the Falklands and created history as it was the first-round-the-world flight by an RMAF Hercules covering more than 45,000 kilometres and clocking some 89 hours.

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