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Sailor

AZHAR SETS SAIL FOR ROUND-THE-WORLD VOYAGE

LANGKAWI, Feb 2 (Bernama) -- Azhar Mansor set sail today in a solo attempt not only to become the first Malaysian to circumnavigate the globe in a wind-powered yacht but in a record time of less than 105 days at that.

Azhar, 40, set off for the 21,600-nautical mile voyage from the Awana Porto Malai Resort in Tanjung Malai here after being flagged off by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at 4.15 pm.

His is the first attempt to circle the globe beginning from the Indian Ocean with Langkawi as the starting point. Previous attempts by Westerners began from the Atlantic Ocean.

Frenchman Christophe Auguin holds the current world circumnavigation record of 105 days, 20 hours, 31 minutes and 23 seconds set in 1997 in the yacht "Geodis".

To accomplish his feat, Azhar, whose preparations started two-and-half years ago, would have to sail along Cape Leeuwin of Australia, South Cape of New Zealand, Cape Horn in South America, Fernando de Noronha Island in the Atlantic Ocean, the Cape of Good Hope and back to Langkawi in May this year.

Azhar said that Dr Mahathir would like him to convey to the world the spirit of "Malaysia Boleh" (Malaysia can do it) during his voyage.

The World Sailing Speed Record Council (WSRC) would monitor and accredit Azhar's voyage by satellite.

"I'm extremely excited about my solo attempt for which many people have expressed support. I hope the people will always support and pray for me throughout the journey," he said.

Azhar said the public could keep track of his entire journey via the Internet as his yacht is equipped with facsimile, e-mail and telex facilities.

For this purpose two communication centres have been set up at the Kuala Lumpur City Centre and the Awana Porto Malai Resort in Langkawi with the help of Sapura Holdings, one of his major sponsors.

Azhar's preparations for today's historic voyage include sailing non-stop to bring home the RM1.8-million yacht, christened the "Jalur Gemilang", from Sydney where it was built.

His 10,000 km journey from there to Port Klang where he docked on Oct 25 last year was a record by itself and Azhar arrived at the Awana Resort on Nov 4 last year from Port Klang.

The Jalur Gemilang, a handsome 15.2m single-handed high performance ocean racer, was custom-designed by world renowned yacht designer Scott Jutson.

Azhar reckoned that his journey through Cape Horn in South America where two major oceans -- the Pacific and the Atlantic -- meet would be very tough and challenging because of adverse sailing conditions.

He would be carrying along some two tonnes of food, including canned red beans, instant noodles and mineral water, to last him 100 to 130 days.

"I got several plans in mind if I succeed in this attempt such as opening a sailing gallery in Kuala Lumpur to display every facet of this historic attempt", he said.

He also planned to write a book about his solo attempt to sail around the world which has been a life-long ambition, said Azhar, who holds a diploma in marine engineering from the Singapore Polytechnic.

Azhar's sea-faring experience came from his previous job on merchant

ships.

-- BERNAMA

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