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Azhar starts out on solo voyage across the seven seas

Saiful Azhar Abdullah; K. Bala

LANGKAWI, Tues. - Azhar Mansor set sail today on his non-stop solo round-the-world trip with words of encouragement from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The 41-year-old Malaysian seaman is attempting to set a world record in his 21,600 nautical mile journey across the seven seas, where nature still holds sway over man.

Dr Mahathir, who was accompanied by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, boarded the RM2 million hi-tech yacht called Jalur Gemilang and later flagged him off at Awana Porto Malai.

The Prime Minister asked him to concentrate on achieving the world record in less than 100 days and forget about his worries for his future and that of his family.

He said the Government would help him to care for his welfare and that of his family failing which it would get the private sector to do so.

Dr Mahathir noted that it was a tough effort to sail around the world in a record time of 100 days or less.

"Azhar has to sail without engine unless something happens. If he uses the engine, he will be disqualified.

"Furthermore, he cannot land anywhere and he has to sail without setting foot on land from Langkawi and return.

"With no one to help him, I don't know when he will have the time to sleep, eat and attend to various calls.

"Frankly, I would not want to be in his shoes but I would like to help people to do things which I am not capable of doing myself," he added.

Dr Mahathir referred to the feats by Malaysians embodying the Malaysia Boleh concept, which included the conquest of Mount Everest by a group of people who had not seen snow before, and another group which parachuted down to the North Pole together with the national car.

He was confident that Azhar would achieve the feat he had set himself.

Dr Mahathir thanked various sponsors for helping Azhar.

Azhar, in a short farewell speech, thanked Dr Mahathir for helping him to realise his two-year-old dream.

He also thanked the various sponsors and also Malaysians who had given physical and moral support.

"I am doing this for all of you, I will be back in May, God-willing."

During his journey, Azhar will be reporting daily to the offshore base at the Awana Resort.

He will also be in touch by e-mail and telephone. There will be a website on the progress of his journey: [www.jalurgemilang.com.my](http://www.jalurgemilang.com.my).

The present world record for such a feat is held by Frenchman Christophe Auguin with a record of 105 days, 20 hours, 31 minutes and 23 seconds.

Azhar's route will take him from Langkawi and through the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic oceans, and then back to Langkawi passing five southern-most capes and making a long loop northwards of Recife in Brazil to complete the 21,600 nautical miles (40,000km) required by the World Sailing Speed Record Council, Britain, as a circumnavigation.

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