

13/08/1999

Azhar's achievement reinforces the 'Malaysia Boleh' belief

K. Bala

AS Datuk Azhar Mansor lay fast asleep resting his tired body and mind at the Awana Porto Malai early this morning, a few Thai tourists were busy taking photos using the marina with the parked yachts including the Jalur Gemilang as the backdrop.

To these foreigners, it was just a picture to take home. But for Malaysians, Azhar, his yacht and his round-the-world solo journey completed just a few hours earlier symbolised the "Malaysia Boleh" spirit.

Azhar was living proof that if Malaysians set their hearts and minds to something, there is nothing they cannot achieve be it sailing round the world alone or conquering Mount Everest or even going to the moon.

We do not have to be bystanders anymore, applauding big brothers, especially those from the West, whenever they achieve great feats as in the olden days.

We may have been late in arriving compared to those from the developed nations, but arrive we have. We can be even better if we adopt the spirit shown by Malaysians such as Azhar.

This need to have confidence in ourselves to scale great heights in all fields was in fact the essence of the welcoming speech by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who personally greeted Azhar as he stepped shore.

The Prime Minister said Azhar's triumph of the seven seas was also an inspiration to him to guide the nation to greater development and progress.

Azhar's journey and other difficult feats earlier by Malaysians should indeed spur not just politicians to steer the nation to greater heights but also the business sector and the man in the street, especially the young, to play their part together in this process of national maturity.

We have dared to dream and work hard to see these dreams come true, examples of which are the national car, the Multimedia Super Corridor and conquering Mount Everest.

For, after all, Azhar was dreaming a mere two years ago when he wanted to be the first Malaysian to circumnavigate the globe and to better Frenchman Christophe Auguin's record of 105 days, 20 hours 31 minutes and 23 seconds set in 1997.

By chance, a senior journalist of the New Straits Times met him on the legendary island and gave him the much needed publicity. Then the Prime Minister, to whom Azhar had turned, played the lead role.

A few generous corporate bodies and their leaders chipped in and the hi-tech yacht was commissioned.

But then came the most difficult part - the arduous journey itself. Azhar was flagged off on Feb 2 from the Star Cruise Jetty beside Awana Porto Malai Resort.

After braving the seas the dream turned into a nightmare when in rough weather the mast of Jalur Gemilang broke into three on April 12.

This was when Azhar displayed true grit to show all of us that when the going gets tough, the tough get going. Amidst fears for his life and limb, he managed to steer the boat to the Falklands with a makeshift sail on April 25.

The nation rallied behind him and, after a new mast was fitted, he set sail again on May 26 though his hope of bettering the world record was dashed.

It was during the days and hours of adversity when Azhar struggled with