

06 AUG 1999

Azhar-Homecoming

GRAND CEREMONY AWAITS HERO AZHAR'S HOMECOMING ON TUESDAY

By: Nor Hammad Wariman

LANGKAWI, Aug 6 (Bernama) -- After more than six months grappling with tough and challenging sea conditions ever imagined, mariner Datuk Azhar Mansor is set to become the first Malaysian to sail solo round the world when he crosses the finish line here on Wednesday.

Upon crossing the finish line at the Star Cruise jetty here at about 4 pm, he will also become the first person to set a solo east-west circumnavigation record covering more than 25,000 nautical miles.

The attempt by Azhar, 41, who set sail from here on Feb 2, is the first for circling the globe from the Indian Ocean and ending at Langkawi.

Previous attempts by mostly Western mariners began from the Atlantic Ocean.

At a meeting last Tuesday a high-level homecoming committee drew up a grand ceremony to receive Azhar when he arrives here, said Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) general manager and committee chairman Datuk Abdul Halil Mutalib.

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is patron of the Jalur Gemilang Challenge project 1999, which is behind Azhar's record-breaking attempt, will lead the welcoming reception befitting a national hero's homecoming.

Following is the sequence of events scheduled for Tuesday's homecoming ceremony;

- \* marine police patrol boats will escort Azhar and the RM2-million ocean racer Jalur Gemilang to Langkawi shores when he is 20 nautical miles at sea;

- \* Azhar will be accorded a fleet review of vessels, a traditional taking-the-salute ritual for mariners, as he gets closer to the jetty;

- \* a flypast by several aircraft and microlite planes from various points of the jetty adjacent to the Awana Porto Malai resort as Azhar approaches it to berth;

- \* Dr Mahathir receives Azhar at the resort where he will hand over Jalur Gemilang, the national flag to the Prime Minister.

It is the same jetty where Dr Mahathir flagged off Azhar and the ocean racer last Feb 2 for the glory-seeking journey.

Azhar's wife Sara Maria and their three children Eizaz, 13, Elliz, nine and Eizhan, seven, are understandably excited about greeting their loved one's return after six months.

They would fly here from Kuala Lumpur on Monday for the long-awaited reunion.

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 (March 3);

- \* South East Cape of Tasmania (March 14);

- \* South Cape of New Zealand (March 19);

- \* Cape Horn (April 18); and

- \* Cape of Good Hope 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

recently.

Azhar's younger brother Azmi, coordinator of the Jalur Gemilang Challenge project '99, said several events have been lined up for Azhar upon his return.

These include attending a gathering at the Bukit Jalil Sports Complex in Kuala Lumpur and taking part in the Proton Merdeka Race at the Sepang FI circuit.

He said Azhar was also contemplating about opening a sailing gallery and writing a book about his voyage.

-- BERNAMA

NH RYN