

03/08/1999

Grand welcome in store for Azhar

LANGKAWI, Mon - A rousing welcome to be led by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad awaits solo round-the-world sailor Datuk Azhar Mansor who is expected to arrive on Aug 10.

Azhar is scheduled to dock his Jalur Gemilang at the jetty adjacent to the Awana Porto Malai where the Prime Minister flagged him off on Feb 2.

Plans for the hero's homecoming ceremony were ironed out at a meeting this evening, chaired by Langkawi Development Authority general manager Datuk Abdul Halil Mutalib.

Azhar, the first Malaysian to sail solo round the globe, will become the first person ever to set a solo east-west circumnavigation record.

He had set out to be the first person to take the East-West route and also beat the solo world record of 105 days, 20 hours and 31 minutes achieved by Frenchman Christophe Auguin in 1997.

However, the Malaysian's dream of upstaging Auguin was shattered when the mast of Jalur Gemilang broke near the Falklands on April 25. But after 30 days in the Falklands where a new mast was flown in and fitted, he resumed the journey on May 26.

His courage and determination to continue with the arduous journey earned him a datukship from his home State Perlis.

As Azhar approaches the Langkawi shores, he will be greeted first by patrol boats from the Malaysian marine police some 20 nautical miles at sea. Other vessels will gather to "salute" the sailor as he gets closer to the jetty.

When his battered yacht, which would have crossed five seas, four continents and five capes, approaches to berth at the jetty, four RMAF bulldog aircraft and three microlite planes will zoom past.

There will also be water cascading out from various points of the jetty.

As Azhar steps out, he will be met by Dr Mahathir and board a buggy with him to the Awana resort where the ceremony will begin, including the handing over of the Jalur Gemilang flag to the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, Azhar made little progress due to light wind conditions at his present location after heavy cloud formation in the area made his voyage a wet ordeal.

Azhar will round Sabang Island located off northern Sumatra in Indonesia to reach Langkawi in his home run.

In his latest e-mail despatch to the shore base today, the Jalur Gemilang skipper said progress was rather slow at the light convergence zone.

Azhar had progressed some 24,062 nautical miles since he left Langkawi on his solo round the world voyage. He has another 1,330 nautical miles to sail before ending the voyage in Langkawi.

Jalur Gemilang's latest position today was at Latitude 03 degrees 29' 37" South, Longitude 080 degrees 12' 66" East. The ocean racer is headed at course bearing 040 at a constant speed of six knots.

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