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Mission-Azhar

NEW MAST FOR JALUR GEMILANG ARRIVES IN THE FALKLANDS

By: Noor Hammad Wariman

THE FALKLANDS, May 13 (Bernama) -- The RMAF plane bringing a RM150,000-replacement mast for the Jalur Gemilang yacht today arrived here to enable Malaysian mariner Azhar Mansor resume his record-breaking attempt to circumnavigate the globe.

The C-130 Hercules piloted by Lt-Col Fadhil Sheikh Ahmad touched down at the Royal Air Force base in Mount Pleasant here at about 3.45 pm local time Wednesday (4am Thursday Malaysian time) after a total of 44 hours of flight time.

Azhar and Jalur Gemilang Challenge's technical adviser Noel Belman greeted the 17 RMAF crewmen, his younger brother Azmi, who is coordinator of the Jalur Gemilang Challenge project '99, Malaysian journalists and Joel Berg, a rigger from Allyacht Spars, on arrival here.

Azhar is taking shelter here while waiting for Jalur Gemilang's original mast, which broke into three in a storm during his round-the-world voyage, get replaced.

The new mast, manufactured by the Brisbane-based Allyacht Spars, was picked up by the RMAF airlift mission enroute here. The aircraft, which made stopovers at Darwin, Brisbane, Fiji, Tahiti, Easter Island and Santiago, recorded a journey of about 13,200 nautical miles.

Azhar said he was grateful that the RMAF's mission had helped cut down by two weeks the time needed to transport the new mast here.

"Hopefully within one and a half weeks time, I could get all the rigging and tuning of the mast before starting the remaining journey of about 11,000 nautical miles," he told Malaysian journalists.

Azhar said within that period he should be ready to decide on the exact date to continue his journey.

"I will stick to the normal route by sailing along Fernando de Noronha island in the Atlantic Ocean, the Cape of Good Hope and back to Langkawi," he said.

Azhar also expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim for their letters of encouragement which boosted his spirit to continue the journey.

The Perlis-born sailor said Berg and he would start refitting the new mast tomorrow and according to Berg, who joined the airlift mission from Brisbane, the job would take three days.

The old mast collapsed in rough seas as Azhar was on his 69th day with almost half of the voyage already completed but he was not seriously hurt in the April 11 incident which occurred 900 nautical miles from here.

The operation to fly the new mast is itself considered a national record as this was the first time an RMAF aircraft was being used to circle the globe on a single mission.

It would be crucial for Azhar to resume his voyage on May 15 as any delay in departing from here may see him running into rough seas and storms at the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa and Bay of Bengal in India.

Azhar is attempting to be the first person to sail round-the-world non-stop solo on a new west-east route which the World Sailing Speed Record Council has reclassified as "solo round the world with stops, east bound".

-- BERNAMA

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