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## Solo round-the-world flight bid

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Syed Ahmad Abdul Hadi Syed Hussein Alattas is confident of becoming the first Malaysian to fly solo across three continents in a homebuilt aircraft.

And that's only the beginning of his dream to fly solo around the world.

Abdul Hadi, 29, a freelance pilot and aircraft builder, hopes to leave from Fullerton, California on Oct 17 and arrive in Langkawi on Nov 11 by crossing North America, Europe and Asia.

The journey will take approximately 83 flying hours over 26 days. Abdul Hadi will make 14 stops before arriving in Langkawi.

His limited edition Velocity RG light aircraft which he custom-built with retired American pilot and engineer Steve Korney, has undergone 70 hours of flight tests and is ready in Fullerton.

"I've been told to ship my plane home in a box and then only think about flying it. No way. Planes are meant to fly. And I want to fly her back here from the US," said the pony-tailed Ampang man who was once kicked out of a local flying club for some other daring idea.

His bigger goal is to fly solo around the world - and that hasn't escaped the Prime Minister's attention.

Abdul Hadi took the opportunity to meet Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed in Langkawi last year on the day solo sailor Datuk Azhar Mansor was scheduled to arrive after his round-the-world voyage.

"The Prime Minister said to me: take the challenge. Fly your plane back to Malaysia and if you can do it, I'll support your round-the-world flight'."

The plane, which Abdul Hadi has nicknamed "Putrajaya Malaysia" is a modified version of the Velocity RG model. This is to help it fly longer hours and under more extreme weather conditions.

Made of refined fibreglass, it has two seats instead of four to accommodate an extra fuel tank, an enhanced fuel system, additional communications equipment, speed brakes and manual temperature control.

Weighing 1,350kg and powered by a Lycoming IO-360 200 horsepower engine, it has a cruising speed of 300km/hour and can fly a range of 3,500km before refuelling.

It cost RM1.5 million to build and was paid for by Abdul Hadi and his family.

The toughest part of the journey will take nearly nine hours from Goose Bay, Canada, to Reykjavik, Iceland, a distance of 2,500km.

Abdul Hadi must cross the northern Atlantic Ocean and the Labrador Sea in frigid conditions where ice, hale, strong winds and thunderstorms can toss his light aircraft like a leaf.

Falling into the icy water would mean death in two minutes. For emergencies like that, Abdul Hadi will carry a special marine winter suit which can keep him alive for 24 hours.

"Should I ever hit the water, provided I don't dive in nose-first, I have seven minutes to throw out a rubber dinghy and grab all my emergency equipment," he said.

These comprise an emergency locator transmitter, portable HF and VHF radios, flares and a survival kit.

Abdul Hadi feels says he is well prepared for the Goose Bay-Reykjavik leg. The longest time he's flown non-stop is 12 hours from California to Florida. He has logged 400 flying hours.

He holds a commercial pilot and instrument rating licence from the Aviation Career Academy in Florida. He also took courses in aircraft building and club management at the Experimental Aircraft Association in Oshkosh, Wisconsin and at St Cloud State University in Minnesota.

Building the plane wasn't the only task. Abdul Hadi and his communications team of four people have had to cut through miles of red tape in securing landing permission from airports in the different countries.

While airborne, he will communicate with his team via cellular phone and the Internet. He will also be able to take aerial photographs and transmit them over the Net.

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