

ddin (Class E & Demonstrative doubles), Alfian Juma'en (Class F), Shakir Juanda (Class H & Demonstrative doubles), Iqbal Abdul Rahman (Artistic single)
Women: Nur Shafiqah Sheik Alau' ddin (Class B & Artistic team), Nurul Shafiqah Saiful (Class C), Nurul Suhaila Saiful

(Class D), Nur Fazlin Juma'en (Artistic team), Nurul Khairunnisa Azlani (Artistic team)

● **Did you know?** Singapore's pencak silat exponents reached seven finals the last time the SEA Games was held in the Republic, in 1993, but only won

two golds.

● **The New Paper's medal prediction:** Persi chief and silat icon Sheik Alau'ddin has targeted at least two gold medals, from defending champion Alfian Juma'en and 2010 world champion Shakir Juanda. Other potential

gold winners are Iqbal Abdul Rahman, Sheik's 19-year-old son Sheik Ferdous, and another 19-year-old Nurul Suhaila, who surpassed expectations at the World Championships in February by reaching the final, where she lost to Indonesia's Selly Andriani.



TEENAGE WARRIOR

After a tough 18 months, Alfian's hungry to defend his title in front of his family

Report by SAZALI ABDUL AZIZ
 msazali@sph.com.sg

He is lanky, wears nerdy-looking glasses and has frazzled short hair.

But Alfian Juma'en is tougher than he looks.

You have to be, to win a Class F (70kg-75kg) gold medal at the 2013 South-east Asia (SEA) Games.

He shot to prominence at just 17 after defeating the defending SEA Games gold-medallist, Malaysia's Fauzi Khalid, in the semi-final, before shocking Vietnam's then-world champion Van Ty Pham in the final.

That was a glorious time for the teenager, but it has not been easy for Alfian in the 18 months since, on the road to the defence of his title at the 2015 SEA Games, which will be held here in June.

In March last year, he suffered a split metatarsal which put him out of action for four months.

In January, his dream was in tatters when he was dumped out of the Pencak Silat World Championships in Phuket in the preliminary round by Vietnam's Tran Dinh Nam.

Just two weeks ago, at the South-east Asian Pencak Silat Championships at the Toa Payoh Sports Hall, he suffered a concussion after being floored by a blow to the jaw in his semi-final against Vietnam's Vu Van Hoang.

He managed to dust himself off and win the match on points, going on to beat Indonesia's Ryan Sazali in the final the following day.

"I can't remember anything of the last one minute and 45 seconds of that semi-final," Alfian told The New Paper recently.

"But this kind of things happens in silat sometimes, and you just got to push on.

"I remember hearing the home crowd cheering for me, so I did not want to let them down."

Now 18, he was one of seven Singapore fighters who won gold in the regional competition, which is viewed as a pre-SEA Games warm-up.



Firstly, I'm the champion so I want to defend my title. Secondly, this is a chance for me to win in front of my family.

— Alfian Juma'en, on his motivation for going for gold

One of three national silat exponents who are SpexScholars – the Sport Singapore scheme which provides enhanced financial support for elite athletes – Alfian deferred two semesters of his diploma in Business Studies at Ngee Ann Polytechnic so he could train up to three times a day in preparation for this year's SEA Games.

The national squad will go into centralised training on May 22.

Tipped by silat chief and two-time world champion Sheik Alau'ddin as a gold-medal prospect, Alfian will settle for nothing less.

TARGET

"I want the gold again, that's the target," he said. "Firstly, I'm the champion so I want to defend my title.

"Secondly, this is a chance for me to win in front of my family.

"When I won in Myanmar, I could celebrate with my parents only over the phone. This time, I want to share the win with my whole family."

Winning gold in Myanmar has given him confidence, not pressure, he says, and he enters every match wanting to show his opponent "the standard of a SEA Games champion".

Alfian is close to fellow Singapore Sports School alumnus, national footballer Amirul Adli, who will also feature in the SEA Games as part of the national Under-23 team gunning for a historic first football gold.

Said Alfian: "When we're both in Singapore and not overseas training or competing, we'll meet at Yew Tee, where he lives, or Choa Chu Kang, where I live, to eat or catch a movie.

"We'll talk about sports, training, which teammate is lazy or who is very hardworking... Things like that.

"Amirul says he badly wants to win the gold. So do I.

"It's nice to have a close friend in a different sport who has the same target as you."

OUR SILAT CONTENDERS

1 IQBAL ABDUL RAHMAN (Men's artistic singles)

The 22-year-old SpexScholar won the men's artistic singles gold at the South-east Asian Pencak Silat Championships last month, which followed his silver medal at the world championships in January.



2 ALFIAN JUMA'EN (Men's Class F)

Singapore silat's only SEA Games champion in 2013 will defend his title on home soil, and wants to make up for a shock early exit at the world championships four months ago.



3 SHAKIR JUANDA (Men's Class H)

The 2012 world champion won the SEA Games bronze in 2013 after a contentious semi-final defeat to arch rival Le Si Kien of Vietnam, who appeared to throw an illegal punch to the face during the match.



4 SHEIK FERDOUS (Men's Class E)

Ferdous, the second son of local silat icon Sheik Alau' ddin, won bronze in the men's artistic pairs category, but has a chance in the Class E tanding category after a gold medal at the South-east Asian Championships, although Malaysian world champion Mohd Al-Jufferi Jamari is the man to beat.



5 NURUL SUHAILA (Women's Class D)

The petite 19-year-old followed up a bronze-medal win in the 2012 World Championships with a silver medal last January, and is in with a fighting chance to claim gold at the SEA Games.

