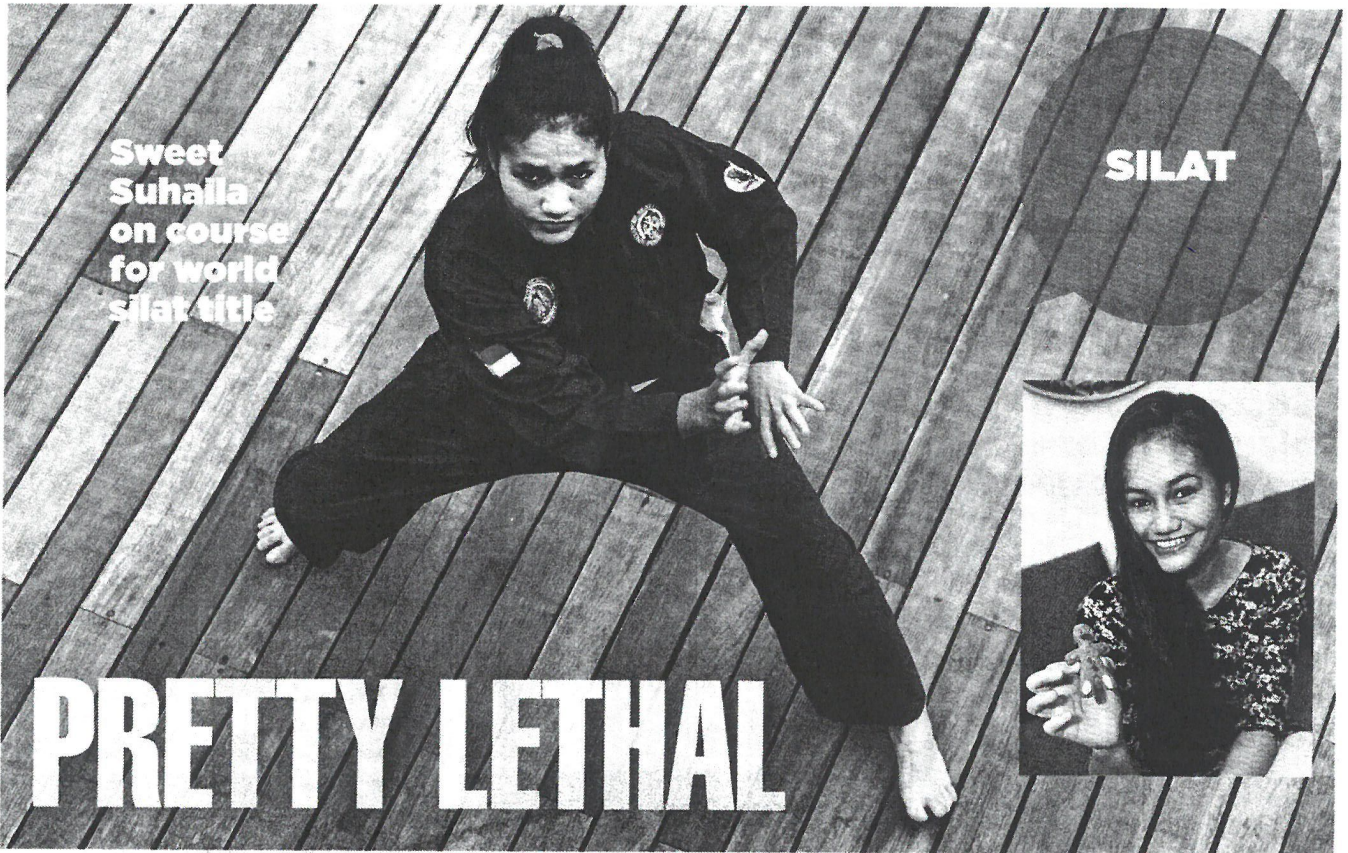


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Description:	Feature on Singapore national silat exponent, Nurul Suhaila Mohamed Saiful, 19, who defeated Malaysia's Nurul Ain Sobrab 5-0 in the women's Class D (60 to 65kg) semi-final at the Pencak Silat World Championships in Phuket, Thailand.				



Report by SAZALI ABDUL AZIZ  
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**Don't let her saccharine-sweet looks fool you.**

National silat exponent Nurul Suhaila Mohamed Saiful is more than just a pretty face.

Yesterday, the 19-year-old defeated Malaysia's Nurul Ain Sobrab 5-0 in the women's Class D (60 to 65kg) semi-final at the Pencak Silat World Championships in Phuket, Thailand.

She will face Indonesia's top female silat exponent Selly Andriani in the final today.

"I'm a bit nervous but, mentally, I'm ready," Suhaila told The New Paper in a phone interview yesterday.

"I haven't fought her (Selly) before although I watched her previous matches in this competition and she is very fast.

"But I've trained really hard for this, so I am ready to win the gold."

The 1.68m-tall, 62kg Suhaila added that she had entered this year's world championship aiming to better her bronze-medal finish at the last edition in 2012.

When asked how a demure-looking lass like her turned out to be such a fearless fighter, she giggled.

"I guess I just grew up with the sport," said the third-year mass communications student at Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

"I started silat at six, and first represented the national team at 11 in Jakarta. Since then, I got serious about the sport.

**LUCKY**

"I guess I'm lucky I haven't really had any serious injuries.

"At the most, just bruises and muscle strains... No broken bones."

Suhaila wasn't the only Singaporean teenage silat combatant who surpassed expectations yesterday.

Sheik Farhan, the fourth of silat great

Sheik Alau'ddin's six children, reached the semi-finals of the men's Class J (90 to 95kg) category, after beating Uzbekistani Sherzod Abduganiev 5-0 in his quarter-final match.

Despite this being his first world championship, the 17-year-old, who stands at 1.86m and weighs 91kg, is determined to go all the way and clinch the gold.

He will come up against Malaysia's Azrul Abdullah, the 2011 South-east Asia (SEA) Games bronze medalist, in today's semi-final.

Said Farhan: "I've trained very hard for this tournament, and even gained 20kg in the last six months to get into this weight class, because my coaches thought I could do well because of my height.

"It was tough for a while because I was stuck on around 85kg for a while, but I made it here eventually and, like every competition I enter, I tell myself

I can win it.

"So that's what I will be telling myself before my semi-final match too."

Singapore's reigning world champion Shakir Juanda also qualified for the semi-finals of his Class H (80 to 85kg) category, after seeing off Nepal's Bimal Rai 5-0 yesterday.

The 27-year-old will face Indonesia's Tri Juanda Samsul Bahar today.

Should Shakir get past Tri, he could set up a rematch of the 2012 final against long-time rival Le Si Kien of Vietnam.

Then, the unfancied Singaporean posted a surprise victory over the towering, 1.93m-tall Vietnamese to become world champion in the Class I category (85 to 90kg).

But, in December 2013, Le exacted some revenge when he defeated Shakir in the final to win gold at the Myanmar SEA Games.

Le faces Thailand's Surasak Dekli in his own semi-final today.

SUGAR AND SPICE: Nurul Suhaila in silat gear (above) and posing with her favourite Hari Raya cookie (inset), gingerbread man baked by her mother. PHOTOS: BH