

All ready to do Singapore proud



The Singapore silat team doing a cheer before leaving yesterday for the Aug 18-Sept 2 Asian Games, together with chef de mission Lee Wung Yew. The Republic is sending its largest contingent of 265 athletes across 21 sports to the Games in Jakarta and Palembang. Some of the national sailors also departed yesterday. ST PHOTO: SYAMIL SAPARI

More than just Asiad gold at stake for Son

JAKARTA • Son Heung-min has lit up the World Cup and the Premier League but, unnervingly, it is the Asian Games in Indonesia that could make or break the career of the prolific South Korean forward.

Anything less than gold and the 26-year-old, Asia's all-time Premier League top scorer, faces a compulsory stint of nearly two years of military service – a severe blow to the player, his national team and his club, Tottenham.

Son bade farewell to his Spurs team-mates after Saturday's season-opening 2-1 win at Newcastle and flew some 12,000km to Jakarta for the Games under a special deal brokered with the club.

More than national glory is at stake for Son as nearly every able-bodied South Korean male, regardless of wealth or fame, is required to enrol by the age of 28 in the military for a minimum of 21 months.

He is banking on a successful defence of their gold medal to earn a rare reprieve permitted only for elite sportsmen like their 2002

World Cup semi-finalists.

Son missed the last Asiad when they beat North Korea 1-0 in a tense final four years ago after his then-club Bayer Leverkusen refused to release him. This is not a Fifa-sanctioned tournament, so clubs are not obliged to make players available for selection.

This is also the last chance to avoid a call-up for goalkeeper Jo Hyeon-woo, 25, who shot to fame with a string of saves in the 2-0 World Cup win over Germany, and Japan-based Hwang Ui-jo, 25.

While South Korea are the favourites, the competition features fellow 2018 World Cup contestants Japan, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Unlike their rivals, the Taeguk Warriors have used the three wild cards, players aged 23 and over, to bring in their biggest stars.

They start their campaign against Bahrain today before further group matches against Malaysia and Kyrgyzstan.

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