

BREAKTHROUGH

Pencak silat
to make
Asian Games
debut in 2018

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Singapore's pencak silat exponents will now get the chance to compete at the continental level, after the sport was officially included in the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta.

Local silat chief Sheik Alau'ddin, who is also the director general of the International Silat Federation (Persilat), told The New Paper that the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) had confirmed the sport's inclusion on Monday night.

In a letter to Rita Subowo, the president of Indonesia's National Olympic Council, OCA president Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah "reiterated" several points from a Games coordination committee meeting held on Jan 26 and 27.

One of the points read that silat would be included – along with karate-do, jiu-jitsu and wushu – as a martial arts event.

Martial arts is classified as one of the six non-Olympic sports, out of the 34 that will feature in Jakarta.

The others are sepak takraw, squash, kabbadi and extreme sports (para gliding and sports climbing). The sixth sport has not been decided yet.

Sheik was over the moon at the sport's inclusion at the Asian Games, and revealed it was a result of 15 years' hard work.

"Persilat has been lobbying for silat's inclusion at the Asian Games since 2000," the 47-year-old told TNP.

"They managed to get it included as a demonstration sport at the Busan Games (in South Korea) in 2002, and have been aggressively promoting the sport across Asia since.

"The 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia have given us a good platform to include silat, as the hosts themselves are strong in the sport."

Sheik said Persilat is not about to rest on its laurels.

"Now, we want to set up silat federations in all Asian countries," he revealed. "At the moment, 28 of the 45 countries that competed at the last Asian Games have local silat federations. We want that number to reach 40 by 2018."

He added that Persilat will work with Indonesia's Olympic Council to include all the weight categories across the men's and women's divisions.

It might require a preliminary round of bouts before the Games officially begin, but Sheik believes it can be done.

The two-time world champion and four-time South-east Asia (SEA) Games gold medallist says the news will lift local silat.

BIG TARGET

"All our athletes will read the papers tomorrow and will now have a big target to aim for.

"Before this, it was the SEA Games and the World Championships.

"I'm sure I'll have more people signing up to train with the national team."

Now that silat has successfully become an Asian Games sport, Sheik is dreaming of bigger things.

"It will take a lot of work, but the next target is to make it an Olympic sport," he said. "Already, there is interest in silat from as far away as Guatemala and Brazil. I am looking at the 2024 Olympics as a possibility."

Alfian Juma'en, the teenager who won an unlikely gold medal in the Class F (70kg-75kg) category at the 2013 SEA Games in Myanmar, was excited by the news.

Said the Ngee Ann Polytechnic student: "It's a proud thing for the silat community, and it gives us athletes even more fire and motivation to train harder."

LOCAL HOPE: Sheik Farhan (above), who won the Class J (90-95kg) world title last month, will be one of Singapore silat's hopes for the 2018 Asian Games. TNP PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR