

Sunday, July 31, 2022

# SINGAPORE ON COURSE FOR BEST SHOWING

With 2 golds and 7 finals to come at silat world meet, team could eclipse 2018 haul

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The Republic's exponents have a chance to record their best showing at the World Pencak Silat Championships, following two artistic gold medals won on Friday night and seven more athletes set to compete in the tanding (match) finals today.

Singapore's best performance at the world meet was in 2018 when, on home soil, its athletes claimed seven gold, six silver and seven bronze medals.

The biennial competition, which is being held in Melaka, Malaysia, returns this year after a four-year hiatus - the 2020 edition did not take place due to the pandemic.

Singapore have racked up two titles so far courtesy of Iqbal Abdul Rahman in the male artistic singles, as well as the female artistic trio of Amirah Sahrin and Iffah Ba-

trisyia Noh - who are both 19 - and Nur Ashikin Zulkifli, 22.

While Iqbal's win was somewhat expected - he also won gold in 2018 and at the SEA Games in May - the women's was a surprise.

They had settled for bronze at the Hanoi SEA Games and were among 19 of the 30-strong Singapore contingent who were making their world championship debut.

"It feels surreal, and we are still in disbelief," Amirah told *The Sunday Times* in a phone interview.

"The win was unexpected because we were facing our opponents from the SEA Games (Vietnam) who went on to win gold, so we knew what we were up against."

Amirah added that they had learnt from their SEA Games outing and have been working on synchronising each other's movements more sharply since.

For Iqbal, retaining his title left him "beyond words". "I'm just too



Above: (From left) The trio of Iffah-Batrisyia Noh, Nur Ashikin Zulkifli and Amirah Sahrin en route to winning gold in the female artistic trio final at the World Pencak Silat Championships in Melaka. Below: Iqbal Abdul Rahman beat Malaysia's Luqman Laji in the male artistic singles final to retain his gold. PHOTOS: SINGAPORE SILAT FEDERATION



happy and so grateful," he said.

The veteran of the Singapore squad, who won a bronze medal in 2012 and two consecutive silver medals before his triumph in 2018, admitted he felt the weight of ex-

pectation on him to deliver following his recent achievements.

But he added: "I didn't really take it as negative pressure, I took it as a motivation to push myself harder and do even better."

While he felt his 2018 win was sweeter as he claimed gold in front of his family and friends, Iqbal, 29, still savoured his latest victory.

"Because the gold in 2018 was on home soil, some people may say I got home-ground advantage (because of the subjective scoring)... It's different now that we're away and I beat the home favourite in the final," he said. "That's a feeling not many athletes get to achieve."

Among the seven Singaporeans in the tanding finals today aiming to add to the Republic's gold medal tally are Sheik Farhan Sheik Alau'ddin, who is targeting his fourth world title, as well as Amirah's younger sister Nadhrah, 18.

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