



Performers at yesterday's official press conference for the 18th World Pencak Silat Championship in Singapore from Dec 11 to 17. Persisi was given only five months to prepare after Indonesia pulled out as host.
ST PHOTO: KELLIN CHNG

Singapore can stage successful world c'ship: Sheik

Wang Meng Meng

In the early days that followed the Singapore Silat Federation's (Persisi) founding in 1976, its pioneering exponents mainly performed artistic forms of the martial art at weddings and ceremonies.

But Singapore's hosting of the 18th World Pencak Silat Championship at the Sports Hub's OCBC Arena from Dec 11 to 17 will demonstrate how far the sport has progressed here.

While the Republic has hosted the event previously in 1988 and 2004, Persisi will have only five months this time to organise a tournament that will see athletes from

about 40 countries competing.

Indonesia was originally slated to host the competition but withdrew as Prabowo Subianto, the chairman of the Indonesian Pencak Silat Association, will be contesting once again in the country's presidential election in April next year.

Persisi chief executive Sheik Alau'ddin is confident of pulling off a successful staging of the event after roping in support from national sports agency Sport Singapore (SportSG) and a sponsor in halal online marketplace Aladdin Street.

Sheik said at a press conference yesterday: "We have been given such a short time (since July), but we have great support from SportSG. Singapore is a strong sup-

porter of developing silat... besides the Singapore Open and Asian Championships, we had also hosted the Youth Olympic Games (where silat was not contested) and the SEA Games. We make it happen every time."

SportSG CEO Lim Teck Yin

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Months Singapore Silat Federation given to prepare for World Championship.

"The notice to host the championship came quite late, but I am glad Sheik has gathered strong partners. But the message is not just about having strong partners to support financially, it's also about having strong partners to bring their networks to enable the world championship to be more than just a sports championship."

To inject more variety at the event, Sheik will invite other martial arts like karate, taekwondo, judo and arnis (stick fighting from the Philippines) to demonstrate their skills at the opening ceremony.

Singapore won two golds, a silver and eight bronzes at the last silat world championship in Bali in 2016, as well as two silvers and three

bronzes at the Asian Games in Indonesia in August.

Sheik, a former world champion, is looking to see some improvement from his charges.

He said: "When we last hosted the world championship in 2004, we won four gold medals.

"I'm hoping to better that this time, but we do not have that many top-level athletes. It takes a long time to train a fighter like Shakir (Juanda) and (Sheik) Farhan.

"The Vietnamese will be tough and they have a strong supply of fighters. And do not underestimate emerging countries like India. They are new to silat, but they have so much fire. They will be a tiger in silat one day."

Sheik singled out potential medalists in Nurul Suhaila (bronze medalist at 2015 and 2017 SEA Games), 30-year-old veteran Shakir (2012 world champion) and his sons, Farhan (2015 world champion and 2017 SEA Games gold medalist) and Sheik Ferdous (2018 Asian Games silver medalist).

He has particular high hopes for Ferdous, 22, saying: "He is a world champion prospect. He has matured after national service.

"Previously, he would turn his head away during fights, afraid of getting hit. But now, he would take punches in the face and he would keep on fighting."

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