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Salute for silat

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Sport's president says it will make competitive debut in next Asiad

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PENCAK silat has contributed regularly to Singapore's South-east Asia (SEA) Games medal haul over the years.

And in the sport's world championships, Singapore has more than held its own, producing world-beaters like Sheik Alauddin, Abdul Kadir and Mohd Zulfakar.

Now, it could also be one of Singapore's main sources of Asian Games medals.

This after Eddie Nalapraya, president of the International Pencak Silat Federation (PERSILAT), revealed yesterday that the martial art has been included in the list of sports for the 15th Asian Games in 2006 in Doha, Qatar. According to Nalapraya, he learnt about silat's inclusion in the Asiad from Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) standing committees (Sports Committee) chairman Wei Jizhong.

"I met Wei at OCA's general assembly in Kuwait last month," said Nalapraya.

"He told me that pencak silat is in the list of sports included for the 2006 Asian Games. The next step now is to make a tour of the Middle East countries to show them what pencak silat is all about."

Nalapraya said he intends to meet the presidents of the Singapore and Malaysia silat federations later this month to discuss proposals for the tour.

Silat was a demonstration sport at last year's Asiad in Busan, South Korea.

Nalapraya was speaking to TODAY in a phone interview from Paris, where he was attending the 2003 French Pencak Silat Open Championships (Feb 1-2), which attracted a total of 77 participants from nine European and Asian countries.

Singapore's head coach Sheik Alauddin, who is also the technical director of the Singapore Silat Federation (SSF), said: "PERSILAT has lobbied for silat to be

included in the Asian Games for a long time and we at the SSF are obviously happy that it is finally in. The SSF has submitted a detailed training programme to work towards the 2006 Asian Games. All it needs now is the approval of the Singapore Sports Council."

Singapore finished second overall in Paris with a total of three gold and two silver medals, behind overall champion the Netherlands (four golds).

Mohd Zulfakar, Mohd Imran and Mohd Yusoff accounted for Singapore's three golds, while Abdul Kadir and Mohd Hidayat both struck silvers.

Sheik was delighted with the performance. "They fought very well and performed beyond my expectations," he said.

"They also showed a lot of mental strength to overcome the conditions, especially the weather, which has been so cold.

"This tournament has been a good chance to expose the boys to top European competition and to learn how to cope with competing in different tournaments in a short space of time."

Sheik added that the good performance augurs well for the future of silat.

"We have a good development plan in place. We currently have around 100 kids in our feeder squads. The future of silat in Singapore looks good," he said.

The team's next assignments are the Pahang Sultan Invitation later this month and the Singapore-Johor-Riau (SIJORI) regional championship in Johor in March.

It will then return to Europe for the Belgian Open in April, where Singapore is the defending overall champion, having won four gold medals last year.



Singapore's silat team awaits SSC approval before beginning its Asiad training programme.