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Early bout floors Saiedah

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SHAMIR OSMAN

Organisers apologise after
early chaos in silat programme

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VIENTIANE — She entered the SEA Games silat contest as a world champion, but favourite Saiedah Said's hopes of gold here vanished when chaotic scheduling and poor communication marred the opening days of the programme.

Tipped for gold in the 55kg to 60kg class, the 2009 International Paris Open Silat Championship title holder and 2004 world champion almost missed her semi-final bout with Thailand's Jutarat Noytapa on Sunday.

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The silat programme kicked off on Saturday, and the original schedule had indicated Saiedah's semi-final bout was to be held yesterday.

The 24-year-old Singaporean wanted to stay back at the Games Village on Sunday, but was encouraged by the team to go to the competition venue, where team manager Isiah Majid learnt by chance that Saiedah was slated to fight that very afternoon.

Saiedah duly lost the bout to Jutarat, who will fight in the final tomorrow, and the

Singaporean had to settle for the bronze.

Speaking to MediaCorp yesterday, Isiah claimed the change of timing affected Saiedah's state of mind and could well have contributed to her failure to make the final.

Though the organisers have apologised, Singapore's silat team lost a great chance to add to their Games haul, which currently stands at one gold and five bronze medals.

Right now, Rabiatul Adawiyah, who won in the women's artistic singles event, is the only one from the 13-strong silat team with a gold medal.

"In the first few days of competition, it seemed that the communication in the organising committee was not very good, the artistic final was cancelled, and then we were told that it was on again. The unannounced schedule change definitely affected Saiedah," said Isiah.

Ounhuane Sivongsoth, vice-president of the Laos National Pencak Silat Federation, put the lapse down to inexperience.

"This is our very first time organising something like this, and we apologise if some things are imperfect. In fact, we have already apologised to the teams," he told MediaCorp yesterday.

There was more trouble for the organisers when a howl of protests greeted a change

in the judging panel for the men's artistic doubles, with three of the four countries taking part objecting. But good sense prevailed and the event proceeded.

"It was chaotic," said Isiah. "All the team managers gathered to protest and that also could have affected the concentration of all the athletes."

Said Sivongsoth: "The situation in the past three days was complicated, but we are pleased that things have turned out all right. There have been no violent protests and

there is friendship between the countries whether they win a medal or not."

Singapore's hopes now rest with Muhammad Shakir Juanda, who will compete in the 75kg to 80kg class final, and Nur Diniyati Julaimi, in the 50kg to 55kg.

Both finals are scheduled tomorrow.

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Laos National Pencak Silat Federation
vice-president Ounhuane Sivongsoth



Saiedah almost missed her bout due to a change in schedule. TODAY FILE PHOTO

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