

### Silat takes the lion's share with 18 awards

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**SILAT** was the biggest winner at the 2004 Singapore Sports Awards last night, bagging 18 awards and \$59,000 in cash.

That included a sweep of both the Sportsboy and Sportsgirl of the Year titles by Mohamed Saifuddin Julaimi, 17, and Saedah Said, 20, respectively.

Central to the 18 awards was a sterling display at December's World Championships, in which Singapore captured a record four golds on home soil.

On the domestic stage, the sport has also made great strides in recent years.

The Singapore Silat Federation estimates that the number of enthusiasts here has doubled from around 10,000 in 1999 to 20,000 now.

The sport boasts 250 fighters in elite programmes, which span four age-groups,

of its achievements.

Said technical director Sheik Alauddin: "We need to upgrade the image of the sport. The first step is to get it accepted into the Asian and the Commonwealth Games.

"We are also exploring ways to try and get silat into the Singapore Sports School."

Still, nothing could dampen the mood in the silat camp last night.

As Sheik pointed out: "It's our day. There are wide smiles from our president right down to all the recipients and the silat community.

"We are honoured at the recognition given by the awards committee.

"From a sport begging for facilities and funds five years ago, we now have a building, sponsors, a proper set-up, professional administrators — and the recognition."

excluding the national team.

While the federation had no full-time staff in 1999, it now has 13.

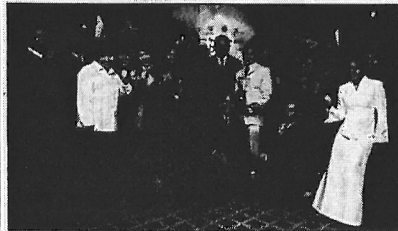
Moreover, the sport now attracts non-Malays. About 1 per cent, or 200 of the 20,000 exponents, are Chinese, Indians and Eurasians.

Silat was also promoted from a Merit to a Core sport in 2004, which means it receives up to \$3 million in annual funds from the SSC.

But, despite its progress, one perception remains: That silat is only a big fish in a small pond.

Critics point out that only 24 countries competed at the World Championships. Moreover, the sport is not part of the Asian, Commonwealth or Olympic Games.

The federation is well aware of the questions surrounding the credibility



**SILAT SQUAD.** There are good reasons for the smiles as these silat exponents and officials can stand tall with the sport bagging a total of 18 awards and \$59,000 in cash last night.