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Badminton-Thomas Cup

DON'T QUESTION COMMITMENT OF PROFESSIONAL SHUTTLERS, SAYS JALANI

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 26 (Bernama) -- The commitment and spirit of professional players should no longer be questioned following Malaysia's stunning victory over China and South Korea in the Thomas Cup qualifying round in New Zealand last week.

Nusa Mahsuri managing director Jalani Sidek said here today the country could expect the same kind of commitment and determination from its four players in the final round in Hong Kong in May.

"There were a lot of negative reports on our players' commitment and team spirit. Their remarkable performance should put all this to rest," said Jalani, whose four players formed the Malaysian singles lineup in Auckland.

He said the players, who fulfilled their pledge to the country, were not expecting any rewards as advised by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during a "Buka Puasa" function at Sri Perdana.

"He said when the players hit the shuttle, they should not think of money. The players took the advice... so when they hit the shuttle, they saw the Malaysian flag," said the former national doubles ace.

Malaysia won the qualifying round after beating China 3-2 in the finals. The 1994 runner-up defeated South Korea 4-1 in the semifinals.

Jalani said he was not surprised by the results as the players put in a lot of hard work and sacrifice under a lot of pressure from several parties.

"I was really confident they would perform well. We had one month of solid training, especially during the fasting month. Misbun (Sidek) has done a great job in shaping up the players," he added.

He said, however, they would not rest on their laurels but plunge into full training on Friday, just two days after the players return from Auckland.

"There is no holding back... we are professionals and badminton is our bread and butter. I will give them one day's break and certainly throw a party as they missed the Chinese New Year and Hari Raya celebrations," he added.

Jalani said their target was not only the Thomas Cup, but also the Olympic Games in Atlanta in July, and the preparations were geared towards it.

In fact, there would be no rest for the professional shuttlers. Pang Chen, the third singles player and reserve player Yong Hock Kin in New Zealand, will play in the Swedish Open from March 6 to 10.

The top two shuttlers in the country, Rashid Sidek and Ong Ewe Hock will play in the All-England from March 13 to 17.

Jalani said their one-year struggle without sponsorship was finally paying off.

"I am happy with the players' condition and Misbun kept me informed on their progress. Only Ewe Hock will have to work harder than before... he is doing well but needs the extra push," he added.

On the training programme for the final round, Jalani said they would continue with their existing plan until the Badminton of Malaysia (BAM) announce the squad for Hong Kong.

"As for us, we are always prepared. We can adapt to anything... we have shown it in New Zealand," he said. -- BERNAMA

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