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VN-Badminton

MAHATHIR WINS VIET OPEN PRELIMINARY ROUND

HANOI, Nov 18 (Bernama) -- The Vietnam Open 97 badminton tournament began today with trepidation among members of the comparatively small Malaysian team but with Mahathir Mustaffa easily winning his preliminary round.

Mahathir, the sole men's singles player in the team, began ticking after a lethargic start to beat unknown Thai Sirachai Panpatchara 15-10, 5-4 at the Hanoi Indoor Stadium here.

The other singles player registered for the Vietnam Open 97 -- the last leg of the badminton circuit before the World Grand Prix championships in Jakarta next month -- was Jason Wong but he had opted out because of injury.

Mahathir faces a relatively experienced British player Mark Constable later in the evening which would also see the mixed doubles encounter between Tan Kim Her-Norashikin Amin and Denmark's Larsen Jesper-Ann Jorgensen.

Recuperating from injury would also be in the minds of national pair Cheah Soon Kit and Yap Kim Hock as this will only be the second international outing by the two together since the Thai Open.

Before last week's Thai Open Kim Hock was absent from the badminton scene since May due to injuries. Kim Hock had stated that he would try his best but could not be playing 100 per cent due to the long absence.

The seeded pair, now slated as world no 13, will only get to play tomorrow meeting the winners of the match between Vietnam's Le Dai Thang-Tran Duc Sang and Singapore's Patrick Lau-Zhao Jianhua.

With only six shuttlers including women's singles player Woon Sze Mei, the Malaysian team to the five-day tournament at the Vietnamese capital was among the smallest.

BAM Manager Mahizan Mustaffa said the team was in good fighting spirit despite the nutritional and the cold northern Vietnamese weather change here.

"They had all indicated that they will give their best and we can only expect that much," he told Bernama.

The Vietnam Open features the likes of world's top doubles such as World No 2 doubles Lee Dong Soo-Yoo Yong Sung from South Korea. Indonesia which deployed the largest team with 31 people including officials will feature world number four doubles players Ricky Subagja-Rexy Mainaky and women's singles player Susi Susanti who is now ranked world number three.

Prime Minister Pha Van Kai opened the tournament which organisers said brought in about 100 players from 14 countries including the likes of China, South Korea and Sweden. --BERNAMA

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