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Herculean task awaits coaches

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SIX national junior squad players were among the 24 names selected by the Malaysian Hockey Federation (MHF) for the Asian Under-18 Youth Hockey Championship in Ipoh on June 1-10.

The players assembled for their first training session yesterday, just four days before the tournament proper, to fight for places in the final squad.

Head coach Zulkifli Abbas and his assistants V.Manium and K.Rajan will name the final 18 today, with many players, especially the top four teams in the Junior League still hungry for another challenge despite just finishing a strenuous season.

It will be a herculean task for the coaches to get the players to click together as a team in such a short period of time as most of them are still inexperienced at the international stage.

However, MHF's move in identifying talented players from the junior league and exposing them at a higher level of competition should be lauded as it provides depth and a larger pool of talents to choose from in the country.

Malaysia is grouped together with defending champions India, Oman, Brunei and Singapore in Group A while Bangladesh, Taiwan, Japan, Uzbekistan and tournament favourites Korea make up Group B.

The final squad leaves for Ipoh on Wednesday, two days before their opening match against Oman at the Azlan Shah Stadium.

The National Under-18 selection - Goalkeepers: Mohamad Firdaus Razali (Nat. Juniors), Mohammad Fitri Abdul Aziz (Anderson), Mohamad Mahathir Thayin (MPPJ); Defenders: Norhisham Shaari, Zarit Zainal (Bukit Jalil), Abdul Shukor Adam (Malacca MC), Engku Abdul Malek Mohamad (Bandar Penawar); Midfielders: Abbas Nekmat (Bukit Jalil), M.Jivan Mohan, Azlan Misron, P.Prabahkaran (Nat. Juniors), Muhammad Shukri Mutalib (Bandar Penawar), Mohamad Supian Muhammad (Pahang SC), Nor Azizan Abdul Rani (Anderson); Forwards: Mohamad Fairus Hamsani, Mohamed Izwan Hassan (Nat. Juniors), Mohamad Fakhrulrazi Baharudin, JR Shakaravarthy (Bandar Penawar), Mohamed Redzuan Nasir (Malacca MC), Ikmal Abdul Jabar (MPPJ), Kamarudin Rahman, Mohamed Shahrin Nabil (TNB), K.Mano Raj (S.Perai MC), S.Selvaraju (Anderson).