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Sports-Squash (Asia)

MALAYSIA TARGET THREE TITLES IN ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

By: Hamdan Saaid

KUALA LUMPUR, April 9 (Bernama) -- Hosts Malaysia will be eyeing at least three of the four titles at stake in the 11th Asian Squash Championships at the National Squash Centre in Bukit Jalil here next month.

If they manage to win all three, it will be a repeat of their feat in Hong Kong two years ago where they won the men's and women's individual titles through Ong Beng Hee and Nicol David, respectively, as well as the men's team crown.

However, the Squash Rackets Association of Malaysia (SRAM) are somewhat less confident about winning the men's team title this time around, while they are also facing a bit of a problem with the women's line-up.

SRAM acting president Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir said nine-time champions Pakistan would be the early favourites to regain the men's title that they lost for the first time to Malaysia two years ago.

"Pakistani players have improved tremendously in recent years and they have Mansoor Zaman, Shahid Zaman and Amjad Khan who are ranked higher than our second and third player Mohammad Azlan Iskandar and Kenneth Low," he told a media conference to announce the title sponsor of the event, here today.

Mansoor is ranked 31th, Shahid 32th and Amjad 41th while Azlan and Low are ranked 51th and 53th respectively. Malaysia's top player Beng Hee is ranked seventh in the world.

Mokhzani said as in the past, two-time champions Hong Kong would be Malaysia's biggest challenge for the women's team crown.

"They have Rebecca Chiu and Christina Mak who are quite tough to beat. But we hope to reclaim the women's title back from them," he added.

The Malaysian women's team may be weaker if national number three Tricia Chuah who opted to continue her studies, does not play in the Asian Championships.

"We hope Tricia will play for the country again. We need her services badly if we want to win the women's team title," said Mokhzani.

Earlier, Mokhzani received a RM80,000 cheque from Mulpha International Berhad director Dennis Low. Mulpha will be the title sponsor of the Asian Championships, to be held from May 1 to 8.

So far, nine countries -- India, Japan, Hong Kong, Macao, Pakistan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia -- have confirmed their participation in the meet.

-- BERNAMA

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