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SRAM aim for a clean sweep

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NOW that the SRA of Malaysia (SRAM) have saved the Asian championships from being cancelled after agreeing to the host job, they want to achieve an unprecedented clean sweep of all four titles at the National Squash Centre (NSC) in Bukit Jalil on June 18-26.

SRAM answered the Asian Squash Federation's plea for help after Sri Lanka and Kuwait withdrew their bids while Hong Kong, who were on standby, rejected the offer due to their World Women's Open and team championships commitments later this year.

Having hosted the biennial championships in 1986, 1994, 1998 and 2002, Malaysia came close to sweeping the four titles in 2000 and 2002.

In 2000, the women were shocked by hosts Hong Kong in the team final while Pakistan denied Malaysia a clean sweep two years later by taking the team gold.

However, SRAM president Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir said that Malaysia have the experience and the ability to achieve a clean sweep this time.

"Being a strong supporter of ASF, we have answered their call to host the tournament after Sri Lanka, Kuwait and Hong Kong withdrew. We want to use this opportunity to win all four titles after having failed in the last two championships," said Mokhzani in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"Beng Hee and Nicol are looking strong for the individual titles and we have other capable players to support them in the team events.

"Pakistan remain our biggest threat but if Beng Hee can give us a winning start against them, we should be able to achieve our target."

Beng Hee will have Azlan Iskandar and veteran Kenneth Low to rely on in the team event while Pakistan will have the familiar Mansoor Zaman, Shahid Zaman and Farrukh Zaman to trouble the Malaysians.

Malaysia have a clear edge in the women's team event where Nicol, Sharon Wee and Tricia Chuah should beat Hong Kong comprehensively.

The tournament was initially in danger of being cancelled as SRAM were not keen on hosting due to lack of funding.

However, SRAM accepted the offer after ASF agreed to their conditions.

SRAM wanted ASF to ensure that the entry fee of US\$500 (RM1,900) per team is enforced and given to the hosts as subsidy, three appointed referees are selected from neighbouring countries while the daily allowances of the ASF referees and technical director will be decided by the hosts. ASF's official rate is US\$100 (RM380) daily.

ASF agreed and this will reduce SRAM's organisational cost which is now estimated to be about RM125,000.

SRAM have also been verbally promised by Mulpha International that they will be the main sponsors. The announcement is expected to be made next week.