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SRAM vows to make juniors potent again

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SRA of Malaysia (SRAM) has vowed to fine-tune its junior development programme and make the juniors a force to be reckoned with again.

Due to the vacuum left by players moving up to the senior squad, there is a possibility that the national team, without any outstanding players, could return empty-handed from the Asian Junior Championships in Islamabad on Feb 1-6.

Malaysia won three titles in the Asian Juniors in Chennai two years ago with Azlan Iskandar and Nicol David clinching the individual titles while the girls' team triumphed to make it their best outing in the tournament.

However, the odds are stacked against Malaysia this time with Pakistan looking formidable in the boys' category while India, under the guidance of Malaysia's former national director of coaching Mej (Rtd) S. Maniam, are favoured to dominate the girls' events.

Malaysia's slide in the junior ranking over the last two years was due to the absence of Azlan Iskandar, Nicol and Tricia Chuah and the lack of quality players coming through the ranks.

SRAM president Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir that this was something that could happen to any country but that SRAM will be looking seriously into another long-term development plan to produce champions.

"We have been doing well in the Asian Juniors but it is not the benchmark for Malaysian squash," said Mokhzani in Kuala Lumpur during the flag-handing over ceremony for the Asian Junior Championships yesterday.

"It doesn't mean that if we do not have champions at junior level, it will be the same at senior level. There could be a champion in this group.

"However, there is a gap between the current juniors and the likes of Ong (Beng Hee) and Nicol. We now have to look back and find the right formula to improve on development.

"Champions are not born and we need to have a long-term programme. There are promising players in the under-15 and under-13 categories who can be nurtured into champions."