

M'sia ready for Nepal test

... Malaysia, Nepal women's national teams set their base in Sabah to test their competitive skills

NST 22.5.2017 20

By FRANCIS XAVIER

Francis@newsabah-times.com.my

KOTA KINABALU: It may be just an international friendly battle, but for national women head coach Mohd Asyraf Fong Abdullah, their date with Nepal at the Likas Stadium tonight, is an important meeting that he will take seriously.

He insisted that this is an opportunity for him to right the wrongs in his side ahead of the SEA Games, which Malaysia will be hosting this coming August.

For that reason, Asyraf is set to start his strongest possible squad in the 8.15pm tie, as he wants to see how far his side has developed after entering the third phase of centralised training.

Tonight's tie is the first of two friendlies against the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) women football championship 2017 runners-up.

The second game will take place at the Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Stadium on May 24 (3.45pm kick off).

Entrance is free.

"As I said the matches are important to gauge our strength and progress as we prepare for the Kuala Lumpur SEA Games 2017 in August.

"We have 24 players in the squad at present, including

nine new faces...they are into the third week of our third training camp,"

"So, Nepal will be an ideal opponent for Malaysia because we know they are a very fast and organised team with a reputation as the SAFF runner-up winners.

"We have met them once last December (which Nepal hosted and won 1-0) so we know their qualities that they have...they are a very strong team.

"It is some kind of a simulation game for us because our opponents in SEA Games like Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar have the same qualities," said Asyraf.

According to him, after the date with Nepal, he is also hoping to play at least two more friendlies, one in July and one in August.

"I'll be hoping to play at least one match at the competition venue at the UiTM Stadium Shah Alam in August 5. We are still looking for the right opponent for the clash," he said.

Asyraf is also calling on the local football fans to come and support the national side.

"This is an opportunity for them to see the national women team in action in front of their door step. There may be no more opportunity like this in the future, so, I hope they grab this chance and turn up in full force to support our team," said Asyraf, before



READY FOR ACTION ... Nepal manager Shivane Thapa (left) and coach Kumar Thapa (2nd left) with Harimau Malaya coach Mohd Asyraf Fong Abdullah (3rd left) and captain Masturah Majid. - BernamaPhoto

revealing that there are nine Sabahans in the national team, including captain Masturah Majid.

As for Nepal head coach Kumar Thapa, these two matches would be the first step of their preparation for the next edition of the SAFF.

"We (Nepal) have not much tournament to play so the matches will be crucial to our preparation for the next SAFF which is another 18 months to go. It is a long term preparation for us," he said while

adding the weather here could be a factor that could decide the outcome of the matches.

Kumar said that he only made one changes to the side that edged Malaysia 1-0 during their first meeting in Kathmandu in December, last year.

"There is only one new addition to the squad. Still we expect a tough game from Malaysia.

Meanwhile, Nepal team manager Shivane Thapa said the matches proved the good

understanding between the two countries in the development of women's football.

"We are pleased to be here and playing against the Malaysia national women's football team. It is a gesture of friendship too because Malaysia played in our home country last December as we prepared for the SAFF then.

"Apart from that, we also want to see how far the Nepal team has progressed in the five months since the teams' last meeting," she said.