



Cheong Jun Hoong will spearhead the Malaysian challenge.

Banking on divers

SLIM HOPES: Absence of top trio could dampen gold prospects

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A DEPLETED five-member diving team will be counted on for medals in the ongoing Asian Aquatics Championships in Dubai after Malaysia returned empty-handed from the just concluded swimming and synchronised swimming competitions.

With the absence of Olympic bronze medallist Pandeleda Rinong, Leong Mun Yee and Bryan Nickson Lomas, the team, led by Sea Games champion Cheong Jun Hoong, only have a medal chance in the women's 3-metre springboard individual discipline as China and Japan have registered their best divers.

Wendy Ng, Loh Zhiayi, Ooi Tze Liang and Chew Yiwei make up the squad for the event which starts on Thursday.

Zhiayi, 15, who specialises in women's platform, wants to make an impact on her first major tournament in Dubai.

The debutante was only selected to fill the void left by an injured Pandeleda, and Traisy Vivien Tuki-

et, who is sitting for exams.

Zhiayi, a back-up member for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, has been making steady progress in junior competitions. She finished fifth in the girls' platform Group B (14-15) final at last month's World Junior Championships in Adelaide and also won two gold for Federal Territories at the Malaysia Games in Kuantan in June.

But the Asian meet will offer a tougher contest for Zhiayi as she will face world class divers from China, North Korea and Japan.

China are unlikely to field Olympic champion Chen Ruolin but are still sending national team divers and should have no problem doing what is expected of them.

"My degree of difficulty is still low. I am here to gain experience. I am aware competing at the senior level is so much different than the junior," said Zhiayi in Dubai yesterday.

"But the coach told me to treat it just like any competition. I have been training hard after the world junior meet, so I am really looking forward to the competition.

"It's only my second senior appearance after a fruitful outing at

the Sea Aquatic Championships in Singapore in June."

Meanwhile, the three-member swimming squad failed to win a medal against a world class field in Dubai but Olympian Khoo Cai Lin and Kevin Yeap made the nation proud by earning two quota spots each for next year's World Championships in Spain.

Cai Lin did not record a good time in the women's freestyle final but her 4:17.88 gave her fifth placing on Saturday. She also surpassed the world meet qualifying time of 4:18.55.

It was enough for the Cai Lin to earn a second quota spot after achieving her first in the 800m freestyle at the London Olympics. She swam a commendable 8:49.96 to finish fourth in the 800m final on Sunday.

Kevin dipped below the world meet qualifying time in the men's 400m and 1,500m freestyle events.

In synchronised swimming, the Lee sisters — Zyanne and Zylane — finished fifth in free duet with 73.650 points. Olympic bronze medallists China won the competition with 94.210 points.

Lauretta takes centrestage

THE honours among the boys were evenly spread, while national junior Lauretta Eva Adrian remained a dominant force among the girls in the second leg of the SportExcel National Junior Circuit (Track) at the Kuala Lumpur Velodrome over the weekend.

Amid more calls for the country's first indoor velodrome's construction to be speeded up — rain disrupted events on Friday and Saturday, while length of events held on Sunday had to be shortened — Pelapis rider Lauretta featured in all four under-18 girls' finals.

The Sabah-born Lauretta won the 200m sprint, 500m time trial and scratch race, but had to settle for second in the 2km individual pursuit won by fellow Pelapis rider Nurul Nadia Mohd Fauzi.

The new breed of Perak riders did provide an eye-opener as they battled the Pelapis riders in the under-18 boys' races.

Mohd Zawawi Azman was a name worth noting, as he took Pelapis rider Syafiq Shazwan Zainuddin to three heats in the 200m sprint final, before losing and almost took a surprise victory in the 1km time trial.

Zawawi clocked one minute 15.561 seconds in the 1km time trial to settle for second with Syafiq Shazwan taking the win by the skin of his teeth with a time of 1:15.228s. Zawawi also got on the podium with a second place in the scratch race and third in the individual pursuit.

Results (all finals) — Boys' Under-18
200m sprint: Mohd Syafiq Shazwan Zainuddin (Pelapis) bt Mohd Zawawi Azman (Prk) 2-1; Third: Iskandar Fitri Ahmad Sabti (Ter) bt Mohd Azwan Othman (Prk) 2-1; **1km time trial:** 1 Mohd Syafiq Shazwan Zainuddin (Pelapis) 1:15.228s, 2 Mohd Zawawi Azman (Prk) 1:15.561s, 3 Iskandar Fitri Ahmad Sabti (Ter) 1:17.881s; **Team sprint:** 1 Pelapis, 2 Perak, 3 PLN Terengganu; **3km individual pursuit:** 1 Mohd Firdaus Suardi (Pelapis), 2 Azrul Taufiq Anuar (Pelapis), 3 Mohd Firdaus

Abdul Karim (Pelapis); **5km scratch race:** 1 Azrul Taufiq Anuar (Pelapis) 6:37.825s, 2 Mohd Zawawi Azman (Prk), 3 Mohd Syafiq Syazwan Zainuddin (Pelapis).

Under-16 — 200m sprint: Mohd Firdaus Mohd Zonis (Pelapis) bt Mohd Fadhil Mohd Zonis (Sel) 2-0, Third: Mohammad Shariz Efendi Mohd Shahrin (Sel) bt Asyraf Naim Ying (Pelapis) 2-1; **Team sprint:** 1 Selangor, 2 TMISS, 3 Perak; 3km individual pursuit: 1 Mohd Hishamudin Jaafar (TMISS), 2 Akmal Hakim Zakaria (Sel), 3 Ahmad Najib Ismail (Ter); **3km team pursuit:** 1 Tengku Mahkota Ismail Sports School 3:50.125s, 2 Selangor 3:51.767s, 3 Kuala Lumpur 3:54.911s; **3km scratch race:** 1 Mohd Faqih Naim Abdul Samad (ASZU) 7:11.438s, 2 Akmal Hakim Zakaria (Sel), 3 Muhammad Amirul Amran (TMISS).

Girls' Under-18 - 200m sprint: 1 Lauretta Eva Adrian (Pelapis) bt Nurul Aidillina Adilla Sam (KL) 2-0; Third: Siti Aishah Elias (Pah) bt Fatin Syafawani Mohd Sani (NS) 2-1; **500m time trial:** 1 Lauretta Eva Adrian (Pelapis) 40.3s, 2 Nurul Aidillina Adilla Sam (KL) 42.39s, 3 Nursyahmira Anis Saidi Ahmad 42.74s; **2km individual pursuit:** 1 Nurul Nadia Mohd Fauzi (Pelapis), 2 Lauretta Eva Adrian (Pelapis), 3 Nurul Aidillina Adilla Sam (KL); **3km scratch race:** 1 Lauretta Eva Adrian (Pelapis) 4:45.874s, 2 Nurul Nadia Mohd Fauzi (Pelapis), 3 Fatin Syafawani Mohd Sani (NS).

Under-16 - 200m sprint: Nurul Alissa Mohd Azman (Sel) bt Nurasyiqin Mohd Sajihan (Sel) 2-0, Third: Siti Nur Afiqah Abdul Razak (Ter) bt Siti Zulaikha Hamdan (Joh) 2-1; **500m time trial:** 1 Nurjeha Iwani Roslan (Pelapis) 42.8s, 2 Nurul Alissa Mohd Azman (Sel) 43.78s, 3 Nurkhairunnisatul Aina binti Mohd Fadzli (PLN Sel) 43.83s; **2km individual pursuit:** 1 Sian Wilson (KL), 2 Nurjeha Iwani Roslan (Pelapis), 3 Nuratikah Fatiha Abdul Latif (TMISS); **3km scratch race:** 1 Norris Aqilla Samsudin (Pah) 4:45.219s, 2 Nurkhairunnisatul Aina Mohd Fadzli (PLN Sel), 3 Nuratikah Fatiha Abd Latif (TMISS); **Team sprint:** 1 Selangor, 2 PLN Selangor, 3 Pahang. **By Arnaz M. Khairul**