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# NEW STRAITS TIMES



## YOU ROCK!

MALAYSIAN Olympians who stormed their way into the history books returned home yesterday to a thunderous welcome by family, friends and fans. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who was among the 1,000-strong crowd at KLIA, announced additional rewards for them, and said, 'You all are rock stars today'.

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Pic by Hasriyasyah Sabudin



PRIME NEWS

# Heroes' welcome for Olympic contingent

**NATION'S PRIDE:** Families and fans flock to KLIA to celebrate return of national athletes

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THE wait was finally over for family members of the Rio Olympics 2016 athletes, as the sight of orange jackets, slowly approaching the Bunga Raya Complex at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport here yesterday became visible from afar.

With banners and flowers in hand, coupled with matching clothes and big smiles, the athletes' families arrived at the hall as early as 1pm to welcome home the national heroes.

"No diet for him. I am going to cook his favourite nasi lemak and he can eat all he wants," said Tan Yok Hua, mother of Tan Wee Kiong, national shuttler of the men's doubles team.

"Tonight, we will have dinner with friends and family. We want him to relax and have a good time," said Wee Kiong's father, Tan Cham Swee.

Lee Chong Hoon, brother of Datuk Lee Chong Wei, said he wanted his brother to rest and spend time with his family.

"We have withheld all our celebrations for the time being as we just want him to rest. It has been some time since he last saw his wife and children. We want him to

spend time with his family first and only then have a celebration for him," he said.

Ester Cham, wife of mixed doubles player Chan Peng Soon, said they would go on a short trip as a family before he goes off for the 2016 Korea Open Super Series next month.

"I am overwhelmed to see so many Malaysians coming together to welcome the contingent home and I believe that they have all made us very proud."

The father of two children, Milton, 5 and Hannah, 1, Peng Soon's success had already made Milton pick up the racket.

Speaking to reporters after their arrival here, the national athletes were surprised by the huge welcome they got from the crowd, many of whom had waited hours inside the Bunga Raya Complex.

"(It is) so unexpected. Such a big crowd outside," said national diver and Olympic silver medallist Cheong Jun Hoong.

The pleasant surprise was also felt by Pandelega Rinong, her diving partner.

Chong Wei took the opportunity to thank citizens who stood by him during the most devastating moment in the games.

"I want to thank the fans. I, too, was personally disappointed. I lost three times in a row (in the Olympics finals), and only ended up with the silver.

"(However), after my loss, I received a Facebook message with a video of Malaysians singing Negaraku. I saw people posting (about me) on Facebook. Those messages made me so happy.

"Our fans are still supporting us even when we had lost. This is motivation for our athletes, for me,

for Pandelega, for all of us," he said.

For first-time Olympic medallist Tan Wee Kiong and Goh V Shem, to be greeted by screaming crowds, loud *kompang* and even *vuvuzelas* was something they had never experienced before.

The athletes were united in their hope for the next generation of Malaysian athletes to step up and go beyond the record that was achieved at Rio this year.

Peng Soon, who rose to prominence following his stellar performance in the badminton mixed doubles, challenged the younger generation to rise up.

"I hope our juniors rise fast. If they are good, we will also feel the pressure. We will have the motivation to rise together," he said.

His hope was echoed by his team mate, Goh Liu Ying, who urged young players to think big and cultivate self-belief.

"To all young players, you have to dare to dream, and you have to be confident in yourself," she said.

The arrival of the national Olympic heroes were welcomed by a huge crowd, numbering well over 1,000. Leading the celebration was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor.

Also present were Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai and Youth and Sports Minister Khairy Jamaluddin.

**Page 1 pic: Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, with the national Olympic contingent upon their arrival at the Bunga Raya Complex in Kuala Lumpur International Airport yesterday. Pic by Hasriyasyah Sabudin**



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, greeting the Malaysian Olympic contingent at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport yesterday. Pic by Mohd Fadli Hamzah

## Badminton expected to deliver more medals

**SEPANG:** Expect nothing less from badminton anymore.

That was the message from Youth and Sports Minister Khairy Jamaluddin after welcoming Malaysia's Olympic medallists at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport yesterday.

Badminton had once again proven to be Malaysia's strongest sport at the world's greatest sporting event when it delivered three silver medals through Datuk Lee Chong Wei, men's doubles pair Goh V Shem-Tan Wee Kiong and mixed doubles pair Chan Peng Soon-Goh Liu Ying.

Divers Pandelega Rinong and Cheong Jun Hoong delivered

Malaysia's fourth silver, while cyclist Azizulhasni Awang won bronze.

The achievements in Rio de Janeiro were Malaysia's best so far in the history of the games.

Asked whether it is acceptable for Malaysia's shuttlers to produce mediocre performances after reaching the Olympic finals, Khairy said: "Expectations for badminton have changed and it has done our players good because it has increased their confidence.

"They already have that Olympic mindset now.

"Prior to the men's doubles final, V Shem and Wee Kiong were the only

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shuttlers joining BAM because they have a systematic method and it is their best shot at representing Malaysia at the Olympics.

"As for diving, I believe we can win more than just one medal and I see many other countries coming up.

"Azizul will still be racing in the keirin and sprint events, but we want to see more backup athletes by then.

"We must also look at winning medals through other sports. Maybe through karate, since we have world-class athletes like Shakila Sani Jefry Krisnan and Lim Chee Wei."

Khairy added that sports such as archery, sailing and shooting underperformed in Rio and they would be reviewed.

Chong Wei said he would give the World Championships in Glasgow next year one last shot.

The 34-year-old, despite being World No. 1, has yet to win any major titles and has always been frustrated by rivals Lin Dan or Chen Long (both from China).

"I know everyone had expected me to win gold, and I am disappointed that once again, I failed to deliver. I had given my best but must admit that Chen Long was better than me in the final.

"But, for as long as I can run and jump, I will play badminton. My first tournament after this will be the Japan Open (Sept 20 to 25) and I will continue to train hard and try to win the World Championships next year," said Chong Wei.

On whether he would be in the next Olympics, Chong Wei said: "I have not thought that far yet. Perhaps Iskandar (Zulkarnain Zainuddin) will be there in 2020.

"He followed us this time as a sparing partner, alongside Tan Kian Meng. With proper preparation, we hope to have more shuttlers representing us at the next games."

"I also hope to see more 'outside'

## RM500,000 for silver medallists

**SEPANG:** Malaysian Olympic silver and bronze medallists will get an additional reward of RM200,000.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced yesterday that silver medallists would receive RM500,000 worth of incentives, followed by RM300,000 for those with bronze.

He said this before more than 1,000 people who had gathered at the Bunga Raya Complex at Kuala Lumpur International Airport here to give the Malaysian Olympic contingent a rousing welcome.

Junior athletes, decked in sports attire, were waving the Jalur Gemilang enthusiastically, and sports fans screamed at the top of their lungs as the Malaysian Olympics contingent entered the complex.

Present were cabinet ministers including Youth and Sports Minister Khairy Jamaluddin and Malaysian chef-de-mission to the Olympics Tan Sri Mohamed Al Amin Abdul Majid.

"We will conduct a post-mortem and plan ways to boost the country's sports industry," Najib said.

He said Malaysia had performed extremely well at the Rio Olympics.

Malaysia received its four silver medals from shuttlers Goh Liu Ying-Chan Peng Soon; Tan Wee Kiong-Goh V Shem; Datuk Lee Chong Wei and divers Pandelega Rinong-Cheong Jun Hoong in the women's 10m platform synchro.

The sole bronze medal came from cyclist Azizulhasni Awang in the men's keirin.

Accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Najib said Malaysian Olympians who gave their all at Rio should be deemed heroes.

"You all are rockstars today. The country has done really well in Rio, the best ever results in the country's Olympics history. But, fate was not on our side, and we will have to wait for our first gold (in medal)."

"To succeed (in the next Olympics), the major determinant will be our level of dedication, not only among the athletes, but also all

of us, from the government to the public. All of us must throw our support behind our athletes."

The prime minister also shared the nerve-racking moment watching the final between Chong Wei and China's Cheng Long.

"It felt like I was having heart palpitations. Thank God my heart is still strong enough (to withstand the stress)."

Najib also expressed his hope to see Chong Wei continue playing, because the prime minister felt that the World No. 1 shuttler still had it in him to play for another two or three years.

## Lifetime flights reward

**KUALA LUMPUR:** AirAsia will reward all five Olympic gold medal winners from Asean nations with free flights for life, its group chief executive officer Tan Sri Tony Fernandes announced yesterday.

"What an Olympics this was for Asean," Fernandes wrote on Facebook.

"Airasia, which has its roots in Asean, wants to reward those who gave us so much joy. They taught and reminded us never to give up on your dreams and never stop believing you can be the best in the world."

Asean nations registered five gold medals through Vietnamese shooter Hoang Xuan Vinh, Singaporean swimmer Joseph Schooling, Indonesian badminton pair Tontowi Ahmad and Liliana Natsir and Thai weightlifters Sopita Tanasan and Sukanya Srisurat.

In all, Asean nations registered 18 medals at the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

Malaysia, with four silvers and a bronze medal, also returned with its best-ever Olympic performance since debuting in 1956.



National shuttler Datuk Lee Chong Wei is given a hero's welcome at Kuala Lumpur International Airport yesterday. Pic by Osman Adnan

## Pandelega: We will do better in Tokyo

**SEPANG:** Diver Pandelega Rinong is hoping her blossoming partnership with Cheong Jun Hoong will enjoy a smooth run-up to the Tokyo Olympics four years from now.

Despite bagging a silver with Jun Hoong in the women's 10m platform synchro in Rio, Pandelega said their preparations could have been better.

Struggling with a back injury, the Sarawakian could not match her 2012 London Games performance, where she won bronze in the 10m platform individual.

In Rio, Pandelega finished 11th out

of 12 divers.

"I admit that our preparations were not perfect. We changed partners a lot, had a few injuries and went through quite a few ups and downs," said the 23-year-old.

Pandelega and Jun Hoong, who returned to Malaysia with the national badminton squad, received a heroes' welcome at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) yesterday.

"We are grateful to have won the silver medal, but are hoping that there will be fewer obstacles for us before the 2020 games."

"We will be training hard in the four years until Tokyo, and I am happy that we have some good talent coming through the ranks, with divers such as Nur Dhabitah Sabri and Loh Zhiyai.

"(Youth and Sports Minister) Khairy Jamaluddin has also said there will be more coaches coming in so there is much to look forward to."

Pandelega and Jun Hoong said they felt honoured by the reception from fans at the airport yesterday, and hoped their success would spur more youngsters to excel.

at a glance

**JM**

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In Oslo on a media trip, Fauziah Ismail visits the world's largest sculpture park made by a single artist and hears stories of old.  
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**GANGSTER IN A WHEELCHAIR**  
A wheelchair-bound triad leader, who is believed to have pulled the trigger himself when killing another gangster in Cheras, has been arrested.  
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**DOCTOR CHARGED**  
A doctor has been charged with two counts of sexually assaulting a 56-year-old cleaner at a hospital.  
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**TAKE CARE OF YOUR WORDS**  
Politicians making racial statements are among the reasons it is difficult to preserve unity in the country, said Malaysia Foundation Trustee Tan Sri Lee Lam Thee.  
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Cases of hand, foot and mouth disease have reached epidemic proportions in Terengganu, and nine Taska Permata Keluarga, involving 401 children, have been ordered to close.  
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**CCCC-GEORGE KENT JV**  
George Kent (Malaysia) Bhd and China Communications Construction Co Ltd (CCCC) have won a RM1.01 billion work package for the mass rapid transit (MRT) Sungai Buloh-Serdang-Putrajaya line.  
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