

Zaidatul on a great run

WHEN Zaidatul Husniah Zulkifli returned from the Rio Olympics last year, she did not get the adulation that Malaysia's medallists were accorded.

Few even noticed the sprinter at Rio itself where Husniah competed on a wild card and struggled to adapt to the chilly conditions in posting a poor 12.62 seconds in her heat.

But fast forward a few months and now Husniah is a household name as the country's fastest woman sprinter having broken G. Shanti's 14-year-old national 100m record in South Africa last month.

Husniah, 23, said she is still coming to terms with her achievement though she is not getting carried away while her main aim this year is to win a Sea Games gold medal in Kuala Lumpur in August.

"I am happy to return as Malaysia's sprint queen because it was not easy to beat the record. I can't begin to describe my feeling," said Husniah after returning with the rest of the sprints squad from two months of competition and training in South Africa.

"It was a good feeling and it was not really something I expected to do. I learnt a lot of things there by training in a new environment."

Husniah believes she can still lower the new record of 11.45 seconds, which she set in Bloemfontein on March 8 in the coming

months though she intends to reserve her best for the Sea Games.

Her new personal best would have been good enough to win gold at six of the last seven Sea Games women's 100m finals.

As no Malaysian has even stood on the 100m podium since Shanti's 100m and 200m golden double in 1997, Husniah's exploits come as a breath of fresh air in the sprints.

"I don't think I have reached my peak yet because my aim is the Sea Games," said Husniah. "Malaysians want us to excel at the Sea Games but I am grateful that I have been progressing well.

"I will try to break the record again. Talking about winning medals at the Sea Games is a big challenge for me but I will try.

"Ultimately I want to run in the Asian Games and Commonwealth Games as well but I need to prove myself at the Sea Games first."

Husniah returns to action at the Singapore Open next week where she is likely to come up against Singapore's Sea Games 200m winner Veronica Shanti Pereira.

"I will have to adapt quickly from the change in altitude in South Africa because I still want to post a good time in Singapore," added Husniah. **Devinder Singh**



Zaidatul Husniah Zulkifli believes she can still lower the new national record of 11.45 seconds.