

Tough task for our divers

Pandelela-Jun Hoong face huge threat from North Koreans in final

By LIM TEIK HUAT

PETALING JAYA: North Korea's Kim Mi-rae-Kim Kuk-hyang pose a real threat to Malaysians Pandelela Rinong-Cheong Jun Hoong's hopes of earning a medal at the World Aquatics Championships in Hungary.

Pandelela-Jun Hoong, the silver medallists at the Rio Olympics last August, qualified for the women's 10m platform synchro final in fourth spot with 309.66 points in Budapest yesterday.

Mi-rae-Kuk-hyang scored 75.84 for their last dive for a 325.62 total to finish second in the preliminaries ahead of Australia's Taneka Kovchenko-Melissa Wu (311.16).

China's newly-crowned Diving World Series overall champions Ren Qian-Si Yajie qualified first for the top-12 final with 334.32 points.

Pandelela-Jun Hoong will have to raise their dives in the final with the North Koreans looking good in the preliminaries.

Mi-rae-Kuk-hyang just missed out on a medal after placing fourth behind Canadians Meaghan Benfeito-Roseline Filion in Rio last year.

Kuk-hyang was the winner of the 10m platform individual title at the last worlds in Kazan, Russia, two years ago while Mi-rae partnered Hyon Il-myong to take the bronze in the mixed 10m platform synchro on Saturday.

Said national coach Yang Zhuliang: "Mi-rae and Kuk-hyang put up a very good and consistent performance in the preliminaries. Like all

FINAL RESULTS

MEN

3m springboard synchro: 1. Evgenil Kuznetsov-Ilya Zakharov (Rus) 450.30, 2. Cao Yuan-Xie Siyi (Chn) 443.40, 3. Oleg Kolodiy-Ilya Kvasha (Ukr) 429.99.

WOMEN

1m springboard individual: 1. Maddison Keeney (Aus) 314.95, 2. Nadezhda Bazhina (Rus) 304.70, 3. Elena Bertocchi (Ita) 296.40; **Selected:** 12. Cheong Jun Hoong (Mas) 252.45.

MIXED

10m platform synchro: 1. Ren Qian-Lian Junjie (Chn) 352.98, 2. Lois Toulson-Matthew Lee (Bri) 323.28, 3. Kim Mi-rae-Hyon Il-Myong (Prk) 318.12.

North Koreans, they don't get many chances to compete overseas.

"I think they can challenge China for the gold, too. It will be a tough fight for Pandelela-Jun Hoong to finish on the podium. They certainly cannot afford to make even one mistake."

Jun Hoong blew her chance to earn an individual medal after finishing last among the 12 finalists in the women's 1m springboard individual on Saturday.

Jun Hoong, who finished third in the preliminaries, could only manage 252.45 points in an error-filled performance.

Australia's Maddison Keeney clinched the gold in the non-Olympic event with 314.95 points. Powerhouse China surprisingly ended up without a medal as Chen Yiwen was placed fourth with a 294.70 total.



Going all out: Cheong Jun Hoong (left) and Pandelela Rinong in action in the women's 10m platform synchro at the World Aquatics Championships in Hungary yesterday. — Reuters