

HOCKEY

Stepping into uncharted territory

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KUALA LUMPUR — In five weeks the Tigress will step into the unknown when they play in the World League semifinals in Brussels on June 21.

If they're to make the World Cup in 2018 they need to overcome Australia, New Zealand, Spain, China and hosts Belgium and make the quarterfinals which they have never done before.

In preparations for an unprecedented World Cup appearance, they went to Germany and Holland for a training stint where they played Under-21 and club sides in both countries.

As hockey is the No 1 sport in Holland for women, our women's team were admittedly a bit shocked to see the level of play but deep down they knew this was the place to be if you want to be world class.

"Girls playing here have experience in World Cups, Olympics and Champions Trophy campaigns," said Hanis Nadiah Onn, winner of 2016's Asia's Most Promising Player award.

"For us, it's the first time going abroad for this so it was truly an eye-opener.

"We can compete on level terms with these girls. The reason I'm confident about



Hanis wants a chance to play in Holland. — Picture by Bernama

this is the fact we managed to win games against German opposition.

"It was a struggle against the Dutch but we expected that. They are a very well-oiled machine."

In the 13 matches they played, the Malaysians won five, lost five and drew three matches.

They beat the German Under-21 team 2-0, Raffelberg Hockey Club 6-2, RTHC Bayer Leverkusen 2-0 and hammered

Crefeld Hockey Club 7-0.

Head Coach K. Dharmaraj had yearned for Malaysians to ply their trade in Holland's league, also refereed to as *Hoofdklasse*, but those hopes did not materialise.

But Dharmaraj always tells them not to fear anyone as they have the potential to do great things.

"If we don't make the World Cup I hope we can maintain our status in the World League Three," said the University

Putra Malaysia (UPM) communications undergraduate.

"If a few of us can get a chance to play in the *Hoofdklasse*, that would be incredible. They look after you well there and it's a breeding ground for greatness.

"For now I think management are planning another trip to Holland just before we go to Brussels for another training stint.

"It will benefit us a lot as right now we're not getting enough high quality matches."