

Pitch-perfect stage in store for Harimau Malaya after TMJ's generous gift



PETALING JAYA: National coach Kim Pan-gon may not get to play a game in the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil anytime soon but he can look forward to a better playing surface in the future.

Tengku Mahkota Johor and Johor Darul Ta'zim owner Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim *(pic)* has decided to sponsor the stadium's playing surface by switching from cow grass to zeon zoysia.

Many Asian nations are using the zeon zoysia grass as the surface allows teams to play free flowing football and

not expect any dampness that comes with cow grass.

"I have decided to sponsor the cost for a new pitch as a gift to the Bukit Jalil National Stadium. It will be the Zeon Zoysia type grass, like at Johor Darul Ta'zim FC's Sultan Ibrahim Stadium," he said in a statement.

"I have instructed the JDT management to assist the Malaysia Stadium Corporation in ensuring the National Stadium has a quality pitch fit for international football.

"However, I would like to request the stadium authorities to ensure the pitch is well maintained, and any non-sporting use of the pitch should only be carried out if proper measures are in place to ensure the pitch is not damaged."

Pan-gon did say that the boys will train at the stadium from March 14 onwards before flying to Singapore for their friendlies against the Philippines (March 23) and Singapore (March 26).

The South Korean cannot wait to

coach in front of the Harimau Malaya crowd, especially the Ultras Malaya, who are known for their vociferous support.

"I'm proud and excited to coach this team in a home game.

"You can see that the stadium board is ready to host us and they have said they will take care of our training session before flying to Singapore," said Pan-gon.

"We're waiting to play in front of the home fans. We'll stand united and make sure it is a fortress for us."

Queries aplenty over Pan-gon's choice of players in first selection

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By T. AVINESHWARAN

PETALING JAYA: It was only Kim Pan-gon's (*pic*) first selection for the national team but the South Korean has already drawn many queries over his choice of players for the Harimau Malaya squad.

Pan-gon has picked 30 players for the international friendlies against the Philippines (March 23) and Singapore (March 26), and test matches against Singaporean League club Albirex Niigata in the Lion City.

But conspicuously missing from the list are in-form players like Petaling Jaya City's S. Kumaahran, and Kuala Lumpur's Ryan Lambert and Zhafri Yahya.

When asked about the omis-

"This is not an all-star selection – this is the national team."

Kim Pan-gon

sions, Pan-gon just pleaded for patience and said that he would assess other players in the future.

"I understand the sentiment but I ask everyone to be patient.

"I can't select 50-60 players at one time. I picked these players based on their tactical, technical and professional backgrounds.

NATIONAL SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Farizal Marlias (JDT), Khairulazhan Khalid (Selangor), Kalamullah Al-Hafiz (PJ City) and Mohd Rahadiazli Rahalim (Terengganu)

Defenders: Syahmi Safari, Aidil Zafuan Abd Radzak, Shahrul Saad, La'vere Corbin Ong (JDT), Quentin Cheng, Sharul Nazeem Zulphakar (Selangor), Dominic Tan (Sabah), Dion Cools (SV Zulte Waregem, Belgium)

Midfielders: Syamer Kutty Abba, Nathaniel Shio Hong Wan, Nazmi Faiz Mansor, Safiq Rahim, Arif Aiman Hanapi, Safawi Rasid, Ramadhan Saifullah, Akhyar Rashid, Mohamadou Sumareh (JDT), Hakimi Abdullah, Faizal Halim (Terengganu), Liridon Krasniqi (Odisha, India)

Strikers: R. Kogileswaran, Darren Lok (PJ City), Syafiq Ahmad (Kedah), Luqman Hakim Shamsudin (KV Kortrijk, Belgium)

BACK-UP SQUAD

Goalkeeper: Ahmad Syihan Hazmi (Negri Sembilan)

Defenders: D. Kenny Pallraj (Kuala Lumpur) Rizal Ghazali (Sabah), Ahmad Khuzaimi Piee (Negri Sembilan)

Midfielders: Akram Mahinin, Zhafri Yahya, Hadin Azman (Kuala Lumpur) V. Ruventhiran (PJ City)

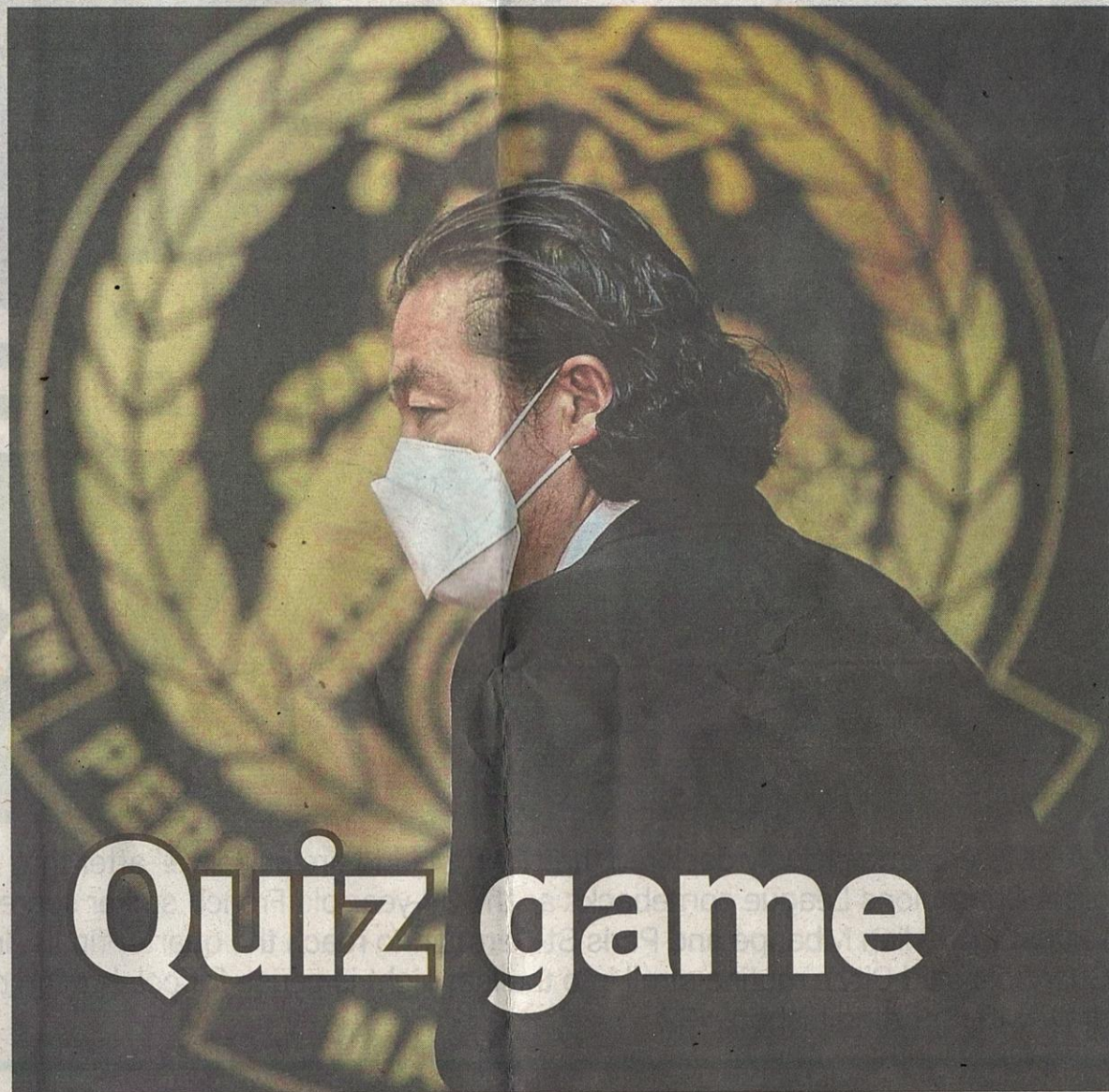
Strikers: Ahmad Hazwan Bakri (JDT), Norsharul Idlan Talaha (Melaka)

This is not an all-star selection – this is the national team," said Pan-gon.

"My decision is also based on my playing philosophy. I can't say I'm 100% right but I want to maximise the potential of players who've played for the national team from 2019 to 2021.

"After the friendlies, I'll try my best to monitor more talents and communicate more with the coaches in the leagues."

Johor Darul Ta'zim dominated the squad with 14 players, including the return of veteran midfielder Safiq Rahim, who last played in 2017 for the national team.



Quiz game

Selangor, Terengganu and PJ City have three players each.

Some of the new names selected are JDT midfielder Nathaniel Shio Hong Wan, Selangor centre-back Sharul Nazeem Zulphakar and Terengganu goalkeeper

Rahadiazli Rahalim.

Besides Safiq, the ones returning to the national fold are Negri Sembilan defender Khair Jones, JDT's La'Vere Corbin Ong (left-back), Farizal Marlias (goalkeeper), Ramadhan Saifullah Usman

(winger), Pahang midfielder Nur Azam Azih and Odisha midfielder Liridon Krasniqi.

The team will report for duty on March 14 and are scheduled to train at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil.