

Another fest in Budapest?

Malaysian divers face stiff competition at world meet

By LIM TEIK HUAT

PETALING JAYA: Malaysian divers had a fairy-tale run in the World Championships in Budapest five years ago but it remains to be seen if they can pull off a similar feat at the same place this time.

The competition starts today but all eyes will be on Pandelega Rinong and Nur Dhabitah Sabri. The duo will begin action in the women's 10m platform individual tomorrow but it is in the synchro event on June 30 where they stand a better chance to make the podium.

Pandelega combined with Dhabitah to win gold in the Hanoi SEA Games last month but the world meet is a different story altogether.

Diving powerhouse China may be entering a new combination in Quan Hongchan-Chen Yuxi and former national coach Yang Zhuliang feels the gold is theirs to lose.

Chen Yuxi won the women's 10m platform synchro gold with Zhang Jiaqi while Hongchan scored two perfect 10s en route to winning the 10m platform individual gold at the Tokyo Olympics last year.

"Quan has already gone through

the Olympics experience last year with flying colours," said Zhuliang.

"It's a new combination but the Chinese divers are usually very consistent and gives nothing away. It will be hard for the others to deny them the gold. They managed to score 340 points in the trials for the world championships.

"I will be not be surprised if China make a clean sweep of all the gold medals (13 in total) at stake this time," he said.

Malaysia's potential rivals include Australia, who will see veteran Melissa Wu combining with Charli Petrov while the United States have Tokyo Olympics silver medallist Delaney Schnell pairing up with Katrina Young.

Pandelega will also combine with Hanis Nazirul Jaya Surya for the 10m platform mixed synchro while Wendy Ng Yan Yee will join forces with Mohd Syafiq Puteh for the 3m springboard mixed synchro.

At the last world meet in Budapest, Pandelega partnered Cheong Jun Hoong to secure bronze in the women's 10m platform synchro but it was Jun Hoong who stole the show.

She went on to beat the top Chinese divers to take a stunning



Dynamic duo: Pandelega Rinong (left) and Nur Dhabitah Sabri will compete in the synchro event on June 30. — Bernama

gold in the individual event, thus ensuring the nation of their best ever result.

Jun Hoong retired last year but Pandelega is still going strong and competing in her seventh straight world championships at the age of 29.

She has picked up one silver and

four bronze medals from six campaigns.

Pandelega's only individual success was when she finished third in the 2015 edition in Kazan while her best achievement so far was taking silver with Leong Mun Yee in the synchro in the last world meet in 2019.