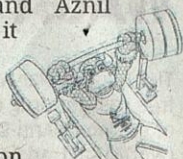


Time to flex muscles

Aniq and Aznil set to bring some early medal cheer

By LIM TEIK HUAT

PETALING JAYA: Weightlifters Aniq Kasdan and Aznil Bidin have what it takes to deliver some early medal cheer for Malaysia when the competition gets under way at the National Exhibition Centre today (4pm, Malaysian time).



Aniq, who will step out to the stage first for the men's 55kg, is targeted for a podium finish based on his silver medal winning performance at the World Weightlifting Championships in Tashkent late last year.

The 20-year-old then lifted 142kg in the clean and jerk to create history as the first Malaysian weightlifter to stand on the world championships podium.

The youngster also won a bronze medal at the Vietnam SEA Games after lifting a total of 252kg but he faces a tough challenge today from India's Sanket Sargar and Sri Lanka's Dilanka Isuru Kumara.

The Indian lifter set a new Commonwealth record and national record when he lifted 256kg to win gold at the Commonwealth Weightlifting Championships in Singapore in February this year.

Dilanka made it to Birmingham with a qualifying total of 240kg.

The one with the better chance to deliver gold is Aznil, who is ranked



Staying calm and composed: Aznil Bidin training in Birmingham ahead of his competition starting tomorrow.

top among the Commonwealth lifters in the men's 61kg category.

Aznil won the gold medal in the 62kg category in the last edition in Gold Coast, Australia, and showed his pedigree by winning silver heading to Birmingham with a new national record of 287kg.

His competition will come mainly from Papua New Guinea's Morea Baru and India's Gururaja Poojary who have personal bests of 275kg and 265kg respectively.

The lifters have been kept under wraps by the team to avoid unnecessary distractions as they have to shoulder the burden of delivering early medals.

Malaysian Weightlifting Federation president Datuk Ayub Rahmat said they are looking to contribute three medals – one gold and two silvers – in Birmingham.

"Aznil's form at the SEA Games was a major boost to our gold medal hopes. If all goes well, we can deliver the first gold medal tomorrow," he said.

"Aniq is a dark horse as there is the Indian lifter.

"Aniq did not go to the Commonwealth championships this year as he had qualified earlier by winning the 2021 Commonwealth championships.

"We are banking on Aznil, Aniq

and Erry (Hidayat) to deliver the medals.

"Their mental strength and fighting spirit will make the difference in the colour of the medal," said Ayub.

Malaysia have a proud record in the sport at the Commonwealth Games.

The lifters have never failed to contribute at least one gold since the 1998 Games in Kuala Lumpur.

In Gold Coast, Malaysia bagged two golds through Azroy Hazalwafie (men's 56kg) and Aznil (62kg).

After Aniq and Aznil, Erry is scheduled to compete tomorrow in the men's 73kg category.