

SEA GAMES

Latif wants SEA Games medal

By R. Loheswar

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KUALA LUMPUR — Long jumper Abdul Latif Romly wants nothing more than to compete at next year's SEA games.

Based on the 2015 Singapore Games, Latif who holds the Paralympics world record at 7.60m, would have finished with a silver behind Supanara Sukhasvasti Na Ayudhaya of Thailand who leapt 7.75m. "I would love to be in the SEA games," said Latif.

"If you ask me whether I can win the gold medal, I won't say I can't.

"What I will say is that I'll need to up the ante to challenge the able-bodied athletes, because they would not want to lose to me."

Last month, *Mailsport* revealed Latif and fellow Rio gold medallist Ziyad Zolkefli were interested in competing against able-bodied athletes.

Their request received support from the National Sports Council and Sports Ministry.

Latif broke the world record three times on the same day at the Paralympics in Rio on Sept 12.

He first jumped 7.47m to break the previous mark of 7.37m set by Jose Exposito of Spain in 2003, before breaking that short-lived record with a 7.54m leap and subsequently smashing the world record a third time when he soared 7.60m.

Ziyad, who won the shot put gold with a world record throw of 16.84m, feels he has made steady progress under coach

Mohd Faizol Harun and does not need a foreign coach.

"The local coaches are good enough," said Ziyad.

"I feel if you want to improve your standard, all you need are the right programmes in place and the results depend on the effectiveness in executing them.

"I'm in awe of my local coaches. They understand me. In six years they have made me world and Olympic champion so there is no need for change."

He said he is ready for the SEA Games, although his distance would have only been good enough for fourth in Singapore.

Yesterday, Sports Minister Khairy Jamaluddin said he hoped Latif would be the first para-athlete to win a SEA Games gold medal.

"I want Latif to be in the SEA Games and I want him to win the gold medal for us," said Khairy after officiating the Naza Corporation Holding rewards ceremony for medal-winning Paralympians at Naza Tower yesterday.

In yesterday's ceremony, gold medallists Ziyad, Latif and 100m champion Ridzuan Puzi and Latif each received a unit of residential suite at Trion 888, Equine Park worth RM350,000 and a Kia Sportage worth RM121,888.

Bronze medallist Siti Noor Radiah received a Kia Rio Sedan worth RM72,888.