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MHL set to lose top stars from India and Pakistan

KUALA LUMPUR: Players from India and Pakistan usually make up the bulk of foreigners in the Malaysia Hockey League (MHL).

But the revived hockey series between India and Pakistan in March and April could see some of the more talented players missing out on the MHL, which is scheduled to start on March 22.

As it is, Pakistan are not too keen on their players featuring in the MHL, with Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) secretary Asif Bajwa commenting that the MHL does not help in the development of his players.

"We are reviewing the participation of Pakistani players in the MHL," Asif had said after the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) council meeting here last Saturday.

"The MHL, as we have seen in the past, does not help in the development of our players. Do we want them to play in Kuala Lumpur?"

"We'll discuss it with the Malaysian Hockey Confederation (MHC) as the release is given directly to the Malaysian authorities."

There were several Pakistan players who played in the MHL last season for clubs like Maybank and Nur Insafi, notably national stars Shakeel Abbasi, Waseem Ahmad and Muhammad Imran.

"We are concerned because the players' form dipped drastically when they returned from playing in the MHL," claimed Asif. "As such, we need to discuss it first before granting any approval. Our concern is the players' form and also if the MHL is being run professionally."

India and Pakistan will be in Ipoh from March 7 for the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup and the MHL clubs are likely to woo their more experienced players.

Double champions KLHC are said to be keen on hiring foreign players after six of their national stars left to join Terengganu.

The Premier Division of the MHL will have six teams – KLHC, Maybank, Sapura, Nur Insafi, Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) and Tenaga Nasional. Newcomers Terengganu have applied to play in the higher division and the MHC competitions committee will decide on it later.

Teams who have signed up to play in Division One are UniTen-KPT, UiTM, BJSS and Thunderbolt.

The MHL is slated to end on May 12.