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HOCKEY: Chance for World Cup ticket

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THE Malaysian women's hockey team fell by the wayside in Round Two of the World League, but still have the Asia Cup in Ipoh to make a dash into the World Cup. India and Japan, who beat Malaysia 3-0 and 4-0 respectively, moved into the semi-finals of the World League, while third-placed Malaysia were left rueing their missed sitters. Coach Nasihin Nubli's charges, ranked 22nd in the world, actually defied the odds to beat Russia and Kazakhstan by 3-1 margins, and then hammered Fiji 12-0. Siti Rahmah Othman was also adjudged as "The best striker" of the tournament, and will be the player to watch in the Asia Cup. "We fell at the last hurdle, but the experience of playing in New Delhi will be carried onto the pitch when we play in the Asia Cup, where another door to the World Cup is awaiting," said an optimistic Nasihin, a former international goalkeeper himself. The downfall against Japan came when goalkeeper Farah Ayuni Yahya turned her back towards the ball and started arguing with the umpire, claiming that the ball had hit a Japanese player's foot. "That was the mistake of the match as the Japanese striker (Ayaka Nishimura) finished into an open goal as the Malaysian defence stopped, expecting a free hit to be given. "However after that, everybody played well but when defender Noor Hasliza (Ali) picked up an injury, and had to be replaced, things became difficult. "Nadia (Abdul Rahman, skipper) had to play defensive, and we lost the connection to attack. "But all is not lost as experience has made my charges tougher, and I am confident of a better result in the Asia Cup," said Nasihin. Meanwhile, Petaling Jaya City Council's protest against the umpiring in their second leg quarter-final against Tengku Mahkota Ismail Sports School Juniors was thrown out by the Malaysian Hockey Confederation (MHC) Technical Committee yesterday. PJCC, who lost the first leg 4-3, were held 4-4 in the return leg and SSTMI Juniors moved into the semi-finals on an 8-7 aggregate. "After deliberating on the protest by PJCC and taking into account the International Hockey Federation's rules, we have rejected the protest and the result stays," said MHC competitions committee chairman M. Gobinathan. The FIH rule, which is clear on protests against umpires, reads: "... a protest from a decision of an umpire or video umpire during a match may not be made to or considered by the Tournament Director." However, the technical committee decided to return to PJCC the RM500 needed to place the protest. Tomorrow -- s-finals (1st leg): Tengku Mahkota Ismail Sports School v Andersons (Taman Daya, 5pm); UniKL v SSTMI Juniors (National Stadium Pitch II, 5pm). Friday -- 2nd leg: Andersons v Tengku Mahkota Ismail Sports School (Azlan Shah Stadium, 5pm); SSTMI Juniors v UniKL (Taman Daya, 5pm).