

Asian championships first of many lined up for Singapore sailors

TANYO-HINN

yohinn@mediagroup.com.sg

SINGAPORE – At the Asian Games in Doha four years ago, Singapore emerged the continent's leading sailing nation with their haul of five gold, three silver and two bronze medals.

With 239 days to go before the start of the 16th Asian Games in Guangzhou (Nov 12-27), the pressure is on SingaporeSailing to deliver another stellar performance.

And the final stretch in the Games build-up begins with the 14th Asian Sailing Championships (March 20-29) in Shanwei, China, a three-hour drive east from Guangzhou.

Nearly 300 sailors from 13 countries will feature across 14 classes, with Singapore fielding a 30-strong team, which includes 2006 Asian Games men's 420 champions Justin Liu and Sherman Cheng.

The Republic will compete in 11 classes.

The regatta will be the first major meet for new SingaporeSailing executive director Edwin Low, who took over from former chief executive officer Andrew Sanders last month.

But creating waves isn't a top priority with Low as he steps into the void left by the Australian.

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420 sailors Sherman Cheng (left) and Justin Liu will fly Singapore's flag at the 14th Asian Sailing Championships in Shanwei. SINGAPORESAILING

major shift in the way we think and move forward," the 53-year-old told MediaCorp yesterday.

"We're very focused on the Asian Games and I don't feel any pressure. No matter what we do, people will always compare, especially with what we achieved in 2006, which was a fantastic feat.

"But to be realistic, we do not want to

say if we will match or better it."

Instead, Low and SingaporeSailing's high performance chief Mark Robinson see the Asian Sailing Championships as an valuable opportunity to gauge the standard of competition and conditions expected at the Asian Games.

"(For the 2006 Asian Games) we didn't set the medal target until after the

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Asian Championships (that year)," said Robinson.

"So we have to see where the competition is, do the analysis and get a clearer picture. It's no good to tell the public what you're going to do if you've not done the research."

Preparations for the Asian Games haven't been helped by the omission of the men's Laser 4.7 class, while the boat type for the keelboat race hasn't been confirmed yet.

Both classes were won by Singapore sailors at the 2006 Games, with Colin Cheng taking the Laser 4.7, and the quintet of Roy Tay, Renfred Tay, Teo Wee Chin, Ivan Tan and Justin Wong clinching the keelboat, which was contested in a Beneteau 7.5.

SingaporeSailing are aiming to take part in 12 of the 14 classes at the Guangzhou Games, compared to 10 in 2006.

The Asian Sailing Championships aside, SingaporeSailing are also planning to enter their sailors in other overseas regattas, including World Cup events in Europe in the months ahead.