



# Smooth road to Asian Nations Cup semis for Speedy Tigers

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## Smooth road to Asian Nations Cup semis for Speedy Tigers

**BASED** on the draw, there aren't many bumps on the Asian Nations Cup road, and the Speedy Tigers should reach the semi-finals.

Eight teams will take part in the tournament and world No. 13 Malaysia will open their Group B campaign against world No. 15 Pakistan on June 15 at the National Hockey Stadium in Bukit Jalil.

Malaysia's other group matches are against world No. 12 New Zealand on June 16 and world No. 16 Japan on June 18.

Group A comprises world No. 9 France, South Africa (No. 11), South Korea (No. 14) and Wales (No. 18).

The winners of the tournament will qualify for the FIH Pro League 2025/26.

Former national captain Nor Saiful Zaini said the Speedy Tigers have a 100 per cent chance of reaching the last four.

"Besides home ground advan-

tage, Malaysia have the ability to beat Pakistan and Japan in the group matches.

"They, however, will face a tough match against New Zealand, who are a strong team. But if Malaysia play their best they could even top the group."

Saiful said there are three things that the Malaysian team must do to reach the semi-finals.

"First is to score goals. With forward Faizal Saari retired, Tenaga Nasional's Azrai Aizad (Abu Kamal) who was the second highest scorer in the MHL, should take over the responsibility to score goals in the Nations Cup.

"The second important factor is penalty corner attack and defence.

"Malaysia's drag flickers must be sharp in converting goals from penalty corners and they must also be able to stop opponents from scoring from penalty corners.

"Malaysian defenders must be



able to stop opponents from counter-attacks, especially from the Japanese team as they play a fast attacking game.

"The third factor is Malaysia must be able to play well consistently throughout the tournament," said Saiful. **After Singh**