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Youngsters to be blooded in MHL for Junior World Cup

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THE national junior squad will be among eight teams competing in the Malaysia Hockey League (MHL) which begins on Feb 9.

National Juniors team manager I. Vickneswaran is hoping the competition will give his squad the matches they need to prepare for the Junior World Cup in Malaysia from Dec 5-16.

Vickneswaran disclosed that Shahmie Irfan Suhaimi, 20, who replaced the injured forward Shahril Saabah at the ongoing

World Cup in India, will spearhead the Young Tigers in MHL.

The MHL will be played on a home and away format. The final is on March 19.

"My boys will benefit from playing quality matches against senior teams in MHL," said Vickneswaran.

"MHL is an important assignment for us and will also be used to assess the players' performances in preparation for the Junior World Cup.

"We have 35 players in the training squad and 22 of them will feature in MHL.

"The boys need to play as many quality matches as possible to be able to perform well as stand out at the Junior World Cup."

Malaysian Hockey Confederation (MHC) have set a top-four target for the squad at the Junior World Cup. A total of 16 teams will be competing.

The squad is currently in Perth to play six friendly matches

against the Western Australia Institute of Sports' (WAIS) Under-21 side.

Coach Amin Rahim boys have won the first three matches against WAIS 2-0, 2-0 and 3-1.

The other matches will be played on Jan 27, 29 and 30 before they return on Jan 31.

The other teams to feature in the men's MHL are league champions Terengganu, overall defending champions Tenaga Nasional, TNB Thunderbolts, May-

bank, UITM HA, Nur Insafi Sporting and Armed Forces.

A total of six teams will compete in the women's MHL which includes the national women's junior squad.

The other teams competing are league champions Negri Sembilan Girls, overall defending champions KPT-Uniten Thunder, Mutiara Impian-MSSPP-PSHA, Terengganu Ladies Team, Negri Sembilan Girls and CS Hockey Team. **Aftar Singh**