



Ms Haziqah Haron executing a flying kick, more often seen when pesilats engage in choreographed fights. Practising silat helps strengthen core and leg muscles, which can aid in everyday tasks such as lifting items. As silat is a contact sport, care must be taken to avoid unnecessary injuries. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

**GetPhysical**

# Getting more than a kick out of silat

## Traditional martial art a rich and proud cultural legacy that hones the mind while strengthening the body

**Ng Wan Ching**

She might not look like the part, but Ms Haziqah Haron is into martial arts – specifically, the 22-year-old is a silat exponent who has taken part in numerous competitions.

It all started when she was 17 and in the first year of polytechnic. A silat senior encouraged her to try it out for a few weeks. After a few training sessions, her interest grew.

“The cultural aspect would be the main difference between silat and other martial arts. Silat allows me to learn not only about self-defence, but also about my culture,” said Ms Haziqah, a food and human nutrition student at the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT).

Practising silat also keeps her fit. The training sessions – conducted two or three times a week, for up to three hours – are designed to maximise the practitioner’s endurance, strength, agility and speed.

These factors are crucial, especially when one is facing off against an opponent.

Ms Haziqah usually competes once a year. Last year, she won two bronze medals at the National Pencak Silat Championship.

When a competition draws near, the number of training sessions in-

creases to five or six times a week. On days when there are no training sessions, she jogs and carries on with her own physical training to maintain or improve her stamina and fitness.

She does all this because silat is a demanding sport.

Besides kicking and punching, key moves include take-downs, which employ techniques such as scissor sweeps.

A pesilat (a person who practises silat) is expected to remain graceful even while trying to deliver punches to his opponent. Bunga-bunga – hand movements made by the pesilat while he is some distance away from his opponent – serve two purposes.

“Bunga-bunga can make our movements look more graceful – a reflection of the Malay culture, where grace is highly valued,” said Ms Haziqah.

The moves might also be used to veil the pesilat’s true intent, which could be to throw a punch, she said.

Meanwhile, pasang kuda-kuda, or stances, allow the pesilat to attack and defend effectively.

“From a particular pose or position, we can launch punches and kicks or execute blocks. Kuda-kuda also lower our centre of gravity, so we are more stable and less likely to

fall,” said Ms Haziqah, adding that such moves make silat different from other martial arts.

They are not easy to learn. For Ms Haziqah, learning the scissor kick to take down an opponent was the most difficult part.

Bruises are common in silat as it is a contact sport. When Ms Haziqah first started practising silat, she sprained her elbow, she said.

There are two categories in silat – tandang (match) and seni (artistic). You can specialise in one, or both, as Ms Haziqah does.

Although silat is unique, it is also similar to other sports in that it teaches us discipline, perseverance and courage, she said.

**Besides physical benefits, silat practitioners gain self-confidence and discipline. During a match, they need strength, flexibility and power, in both their arms and legs. They also need to be nimble, so they can quickly counter-attack when an opponent strikes.**

**ART OF PRECISION**

Physically, silat training allows practitioners to improve body coordination, as well as gain precision, flexibility, agility and power in their movements, said Assistant Professor Benjamin Soon, who is in charge of a new physiotherapy programme at SIT.

Such skills are required during both combat matches and solo performances, where there are choreographed movements.

Silat also helps to hone one’s senses and ability to focus, because practitioners must be aware of their surroundings and the actions of their opponents. This, in turn, helps them to raise their self-awareness, said Prof Soon.

Moreover, silat helps to improve one’s breathing techniques and core body strength.

Besides physical benefits, silat practitioners gain self-confidence and discipline.

During a match, they need strength, flexibility and power, in both their arms and legs. They also need to be nimble, so they can quickly counter-attack when an opponent strikes.

The sport involves considerable legwork, which includes maintaining a horse stance, side stepping, lunging, sliding, jumping and kicking, said Prof Soon.

Practising silat helps strengthen core and leg muscles, which can aid in daily activities such as lifting items or pushing heavy loads. It also reduces the chances of sustaining a back injury, Prof Soon added.

Warm-up exercises should include side jumps, lunges, light runs and abdominal crunches, which engage the leg and abdominal muscles, he said.

Dynamic stretching of the shoulder and leg muscles should be incorporated too, especially of the quadriceps, hamstrings and groin muscles, to improve flexibility.

This can be done by repeatedly swinging and kicking the legs, or forward punching with the arms – mimicking movements used during the sport, Prof Soon said.

As silat is a combat sport, there is always a risk of getting injured when sparring with an opponent.

Proper protective gear is essential. One must also know how to break a fall properly – throwing an opponent off the ground scores the highest points during competitions, said Prof Soon.

**Try these moves**

Here are some warm-up tips by Assistant Professor Benjamin Soon, who is in charge of a new physiotherapy programme at the Singapore Institute of Technology. The moves are demonstrated by silat exponent Haziqah Haron.



**Side bending while sitting**

Sit with the right leg extended to the side, and the left knee bent. Bend your body to the right and touch the toes of your right foot with your left hand. At the same time, use your right hand to reach for the left knee. Relax your neck muscles when doing the stretch. Hold the position for eight seconds. Switch sides and repeat. This stretches the shoulder, back muscles and torso, as well as the hamstrings and calf muscles.



**Standing calf stretch**

Stand with one leg in front of the other in a forward stance. Bend the knee of the leg that is in front, while keeping the back leg straight. Make sure that both feet are pointing forward and the heel of the back leg is firmly planted on the floor. Rest your hands on the forward thigh and keep your back straight. Hold the stretch for eight seconds. Switch legs and repeat. This stretches the calf muscles and the gluteus (buttock) muscles.

**Standing quadriceps stretch**

Stand upright. Bend your left knee such that your left ankle is lifted towards the back of the leg. Hold the left foot with your left hand while balancing on the other foot. Slowly pull your left foot towards your buttocks. Maintain an upright posture during the stretch. Hold the stretch for eight seconds. Switch legs and repeat. This stretches the quadriceps muscles.



**Standing buttocks stretch**

Stand upright. Lift your right leg upwards towards your abdomen. Using both hands, firmly grip the shin of your right leg. Pull your right knee further up and towards the body, while maintaining your balance and keeping your body upright. Hold the stretch for eight seconds. Switch legs and repeat. This stretches the gluteus muscles.



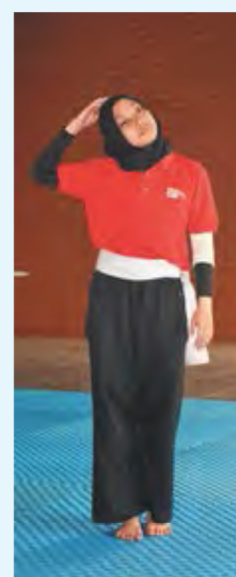
**Triceps stretch**

Pull your left arm across your chest by cradling the elbow in the crook of your right arm. Pull your left arm slightly towards you with your right arm until you feel a firm stretch on the left shoulder. Hold the position for eight seconds. Switch arms and repeat. This stretches the triceps and part of the deltoid muscles in the shoulders.



**Neck stretch**

Look forward and drop your head sideways by bringing your right ear close to your right shoulder. Using your right hand, apply some pressure to pull your head closer towards the right shoulder. Do not raise your left shoulder. Hold the stretch for eight seconds. Switch side and repeat. Avoid doing this if you experience dizziness or flashes during the stretch. This move stretches the top part of the shoulders and neck muscles.



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