

'It is not about luck, but a skill'

Catapult enthusiasts know what it takes to be good at the game

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A GROUP of catapult (also known as slingshot) enthusiasts are eager to see the game gain the same popularity as darts, archery and other similar precision target sports.

"In other countries, slingshotting is a sport with competitions being held on a regular basis. Locally, it is still at the introductory level," said Mohammad Samsul Fitri Nordin, 42, the founder of an online group of enthusiasts with 30,000 friends.

To promote this activity, Mohammad Samsul together with several of the group's administrators, took part in the Malaysian Games festival at Dataran Merdeka in September and Hari Sukan Negara celebrations at KL Gateway in October last year.

"Both events were mainly for promotional purposes. There were exhibitions, sale of slingshots, demonstrations and competitions. We had over a thousand visitors at both events," said Mohammad Samsul who is a lorry mechanic.

Apart from the two events, the group's administrators have also organised online matches and physical meet-ups for fellow enthusiasts.

Present to offer free coaching and lessons at such meet-ups were group administrator Abdul

Rais Jaafar, 33, a former tower crane operator who is now a full-time catapult maker.

Abdul Rais started making his own brand of catapults from *mikata*, which is fabric laminated with epoxy resin, during the movement control order in 2021.

His monthly income from making catapults averaged between RM2,000 and RM4,000.

Following the encouraging response, the group officially registered Kelab Peminat Lastik with the Registrar of Societies Malaysia (ROS).

Mohammad Samsul is the chairman and Abdul Rais, the vice-chairman.

Aminuddin Saad, 64, an enthusiast who regularly joins the group for target practice sessions, developed an interest in catapulting nine years ago.

The retiree used to take part in the Malaysian Government Servants Welfare and Sports Council (Maksak) blowpipe competitions when working with Kuala Lumpur City Hall.

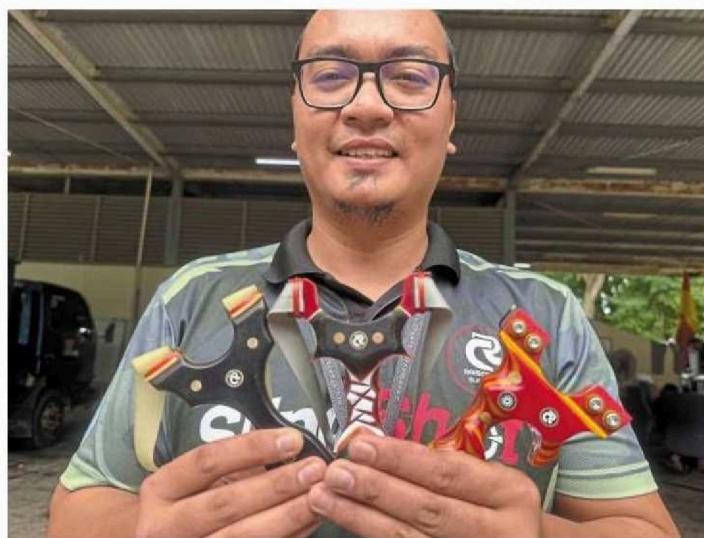
As catapulting is also a target precision exercise, he was naturally drawn to it.

"One needs to be in constant conversation with one's self in order to progress. When you fail to hit a target, you have to ask yourself why.

"Did I move my hand at the wrong time? Did I aim properly? Did I spend enough time focus-



A group of catapult enthusiasts showing off how it is done at the Cyberjaya Lake Park.



Abdul Rais Jaafar exhibiting his handmade catapults.

sing on the target? This keeps my mind active," said Aminuddin who also scuba dives, teaches wilderness survival as well as water safety awareness.

Describing it as a form of exercise, Aminuddin said he could work up quite a sweat, just by the act of retrieving his ball bearing missiles.

"The fewer ball bearings I use,

the more I have to walk. There were nights when I had to take a second shower before going to bed," he said.

Another group regular, Mohamad Shahrin Zulkefle, 37, a production operator, said even the timing of one's breath could determine a hit or miss.

"You need to control your inhalations and exhalations, which is especially crucial when

you're just about to shoot.

"In a way, this is good exercise for the lungs," he said.

Depending on day-to-day activities, both men would usually set aside two hours a day for practice sessions at home.

In addition to shooting techniques, safety was another important criteria, they said.

For group practices, players must set up a cloth banner behind targets to catch stray missiles.

Solo players set up a catch box for the same purpose.

For beginners, mudballs that can shatter upon hitting objects like glass or the ground, are used.

Those advanced in the game are prone to using metal ball bearings, no bigger than the size of green peas.

Catapults must also be regularly inspected for tears to prevent backfiring.

Everyday objects like plastic bottles and cans are used as targets.

More proficient shooters use silicone target spinners.

The better the shooter, the smaller the target, and the further the distance. For now, the minimum distance is set at 10m.