

**PROGRAMME IS 'A SYSTEM OF SUPPORT TO MAKE PURSUIT OF SPORT A VIABLE OPTION'**

# spexScholarship showing results with medal haul: Minister

*Lawrence Wong reiterates Singapore's commitment to sport as 18 more athletes join initiative*

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**SINGAPORE** – Noting that athletes on the Sports Excellence Scholarship

(spexScholarship) accounted for more than half of the medals at this year's major meets, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Lawrence Wong yesterday said the medal haul

— 28 of 41 medals from the Commonwealth and Asian Games — was a positive sign that the initiative had been off to a good start.

"It's a whole system of support and meant to make the pursuit of sport a more attractive and viable option for our athletes," said Mr Wong, who was speaking at the Sports Hub, where the latest crop of young athletes to join the programme was unveiled.

Yesterday, 18 athletes from nine sports, including table-tennis players Isabelle Li and Lin Ye, cyclist Dinah Chan as well as para-swimmers Theresa Goh and Yip Pin Xiu, received the spexScholarship.

The latest batch takes the total number of athletes in the programme to 71 from 15 sports.

Noting that the inclusive scheme extends to both the able-bodied and para-athletes, Mr Wong reiterated that the scholarships are based on merit and are open to all National Sports Associations and athletes.

"The spexScholarship provides support for our top athletes not only in terms of funding, but also in sports science and sports medicine. We are also looking at providing athletes with (job-matching) after their athletic careers, so they can be assured of getting a job after they have retired from the sport," he added.

Launched last year, the spexScholarship offers enhanced support for elite national athletes who have the potential to win medals at the Asian games level and beyond.

It covers an athlete's training and coaching costs, along with educational, financial, career and personal life-skill development.

With a war chest of S\$40 million over five years, the spexScholarship hands out monthly stipends of between S\$1,200 and S\$8,400 to athletes.

Those at the highest level must achieve a minimum standard of top eight at the Olympics or World Championships to get a monthly stipend of between S\$3,000 and S\$8,400 a month.

Mr Wong quipped: "In the past, you had to pay out of your own pocket to play sport. But now, with the SpexScholarship, athletes get paid to play sport."

Calling it a mutual commitment between society and athletes, Mr Wong said: "The scholarships are funded (through) public funds and, by awarding the scholarship, we are saying we as a society value sport and want to set aside public funds to make a commitment and investment in our athletes."

Ms Yip, a newly-minted spexScholar, said the scheme would support her training and studies at the Singapore Management University. "It's important for an elite athlete to get help ... to perform better as I want to compete for a very long time and aim for Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020," she said.

Canoeist Brandon Ooi managed to snag the scholarship on his second attempt. "It's great because I was unsuccessful in my application last year," he said, adding that it would allow him to focus solely on training without having to worry about his expenses.

● **Launched last year, the spexScholarship programme is run by the Singapore Sports Institute's High Performance Sports.** This year, there were 160 nominations from 21 sports, of which 41 athletes from 14 sports were shortlisted. spexScholars are eligible for three levels of monthly stipends: Level 1 — S\$3,000 to S\$8,400, Level 2 — S\$2,000 to S\$5,600 and Level 3 — S\$1,200 to S\$3,360.