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Headline: Rio Paralympians lauded for their 'courage, determination, fighting spirit'



Team Singapore's Paralympians (front row, in red) with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and other MPs in Parliament yesterday. PHOTO: MCI

'ATHLETES' GAMES ACHIEVEMENTS HAVE UPLIFTED THE NATION'

Rio Paralympians lauded for their 'courage, determination, fighting spirit'

Formal recognition given to 13 athletes in a milestone moment for para sports

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SINGAPORE – In a landmark moment for local para sports, Team Singapore's Paralympians were formally honoured in Parliament yesterday as nine of the 13-strong contingent from the Rio Paralympic Games received a standing ovation from the House for their achievements in the world's biggest para sports event.

The recognition in Parliament came after a successful outing for Team Singapore in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where its largest-ever Paralympic contingent returned with their best-ever haul of two gold and a bronze medals.

Among the standout performers in Brazil were swimmers Yip Pin Xiu and Theresa Goh, with Yip breaking two world records en route to winning the women's 50m and 100m backstroke S2. Veteran swimmer Goh, 29, competing in her fourth Games, won the first Paralympic medal of her career as she claimed the bronze in the women's 100m breaststroke SB4.

Culture, Community and Youth Minister Grace Fu moved the motion to congratulate the Paralympians yes-

terday, lauding the athletes for their "courage, determination and fighting spirit". Several Members of Parliament (MPs), including Mr Christopher De Souza, Ms Denise Phua and Ms Sylvia Lim, rose to speak in support of the motion.

"Our Paralympians, with their incredible feats in Rio, have uplifted the nation," said Ms Fu in her speech. "Beyond medals, each Paralympian has shown us what it means to be a champion — to be counted among the world's best, and fly our flag high at the world's biggest stage for para sports."

Calling the athletes role models and sporting heroes for Singaporeans, she added: "These 13 extraordinary athletes have shown us that with hard work and sacrifice, we can realise our dreams. Their achievements also exemplify how a nation as small as ours can punch above its weight."

Three-time Paralympic champion Yip said yesterday that the standing ovation gave her "goosebumps".

"It was very surreal ... It was nice having people recognise (our achievements)," said the 24-year-old Singapore Management University final-year student, who added with a laugh: "It was more goosebumps than tears

— we used up our tears in Rio!"

While yesterday's Parliamentary motion was a milestone moment for para sports, Mr Tan Chuan-Jin, Minister for Social and Family Development, noted in Parliament that there is still work to be done in making Singapore an inclusive society for all.

"While we have made some progress towards a more inclusive society, we are not there yet," he said in his speech. "We want to be able to care, be compassionate and to love. And most importantly, it is in our hearts and minds that we need to just embrace our fellow Singaporeans of any ability."

Nominated MP and disability advocate Chia Yong Yong pointed to the public debate that had ignited after the Paralympic Games, which saw Singaporeans calling for equal monetary rewards for disabled and able-bodied athletes.

While noting that athletes were not in it for the money, she said: "...Whether we like it or not, it (prize money) is a reflection of how society values the contributions that you have made and the lessons that you are sharing with us."

"If we persist in having two different standards of treatment between athletes and para athletes, we

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CULTURE, COMMUNITY
AND YOUTH MINISTER

reinforce the perception that people with disabilities are not able, and we strengthen the barriers against building an inclusive society."

Goh is hopeful that change will come eventually.

She said: "I never really expected to come into Parliament and receive such an ovation and it happened, so hopes would be there that there would be a more equal standing of para athletes versus able-bodied athletes."

"It's really not a competition between us, as we want the same thing."