

Team Singapore athletes honoured in Parliament

As he moved a motion in Parliament to honour Team Singapore athletes who competed at the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Edwin Tong stressed the Government's commitment to supporting athletes at all levels, including disability sports.

This comes on the back of a spirited public debate about disparity in cash incentives, with swimmer Yip Pin Xiu earning a \$200,000 reward for each of her two Paralympic golds, a fifth of the payout for an Olympic gold.

"The (difference) in cash quantum does not reflect how the Government values our para-athletes vis-a-vis our able-bodied athletes," he said. "In our eyes, they are all Team Singapore athletes, and each athlete, abled or disabled, has his or her own intrinsic value, which we recognise and appreciate."

Mr Tong explained that the Singapore National Paralympic Council (SNPC) is working to narrow the gap in cash rewards. The Tote Board is the primary sponsor for both Olympic and Paralympic cash prizes, which may also include private sector contributions.

SNPC president Teo-Koh Sock Miang told The Straits Times she hopes "we have some good news to announce" with regard to whether new sponsors have come on board, by the time the rewards are disbursed next Saturday.

She added that one of the big challenges is to convince private donors to also reward achievements at the Asian and Asean levels, instead of a "one-time" contribution for the Paralympics.

Dr Teo-Koh also said she declined to address the issue of cash rewards up till now as she did not want to compromise ongoing negotiations. But "a lot of the chatter and the noise is appreciated, because it shows that the people value our para-athletes, and I thank them for it".

In Parliament yesterday, Ms Denise Phua (Jalan Besar GRC) addressed the disparity and said "it is time to bite the bullet". "I call for the Government to weigh in; facilitate the process to reimagine, review and resource not only the high-performance disability sports space but also widening the talent pipeline through greater sports participation."

Workers' Party MP Jamus Lim (Sengkang GRC) said that support for national athletes should not be dependent on them winning medals or tournaments. Instead it should be a recognition of their choice to "sacrifice their time, energy and finances towards climbing the pinnacles of their sport".

Mr Tong yesterday thanked Singapore's national athletes for flying the flag with distinction at Tokyo 2020.

The call for recognition was supported by both sides of the House.

Sazali Abdul Aziz