

Gold medal haul for Team S'pore rises to 82

Republic trail only Thailand and could finish second among 11 nations

By JONATHAN WONG

SINGAPORE'S athletes continued to scale previously unimagined heights yesterday when they took Team Singapore's SEA Games gold medal tally to a stunning 82.

The Republic trail only regional powerhouse Thailand in the 11-nation standings and, by tomorrow's closing ceremony, could finish as the second-best country, a feat last achieved at the 1975 Bangkok Games.

The hosts began yesterday on 74 golds before athletes from bowling, floorball, gymnastics, sailing and silat combined to win eight golds to pass the 80-gold mark - which The Straits Times predicted Singapore would hit.

Singapore's previous best haul of 50 golds, when the Games were last held here in 1993, was surpassed last Tuesday on just the fourth day of competition.

Said chef de mission Nicholas Fang: "It's been a fantastic run for us, and to hit the 80-gold



Local silat exponent Muhammad Nur Alfian Juma'en celebrating his victory against Vietnam's world champion Tran Dinh Nam yesterday. Refusing to quit despite a bleeding foot, the 18-year-old clinched Singapore's 80th gold at the SEA Games. The Republic's final gold medal tally yesterday was 82. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

mark and be up among the top three nations in the SEA Games with two days to go is truly remarkable."

While yesterday's victories by bowler Jazreel Tan (women's mas-

ters), floorballers and sailors Griselda Khng and Sara Tan (skiff 49erFX), Samantha Neubronner and Elisa Yukie Yokoyama (girls Under-19 420) and the women's keelboat team were expected,

there were also breakthroughs.

The women's rhythmic gymnastic team's victory in the group all-around event was the first-ever medal for that discipline.

Said gymnast Ann Sim, 20:

"The past few trainings have been really tough... Today, it was all very worthwhile."

Local silat exponent Muhammad Nur Alfian Juma'en, 18, was the defending SEA Games champion in the men's tanding Class F (70-75kg), but his was nevertheless an unexpected triumph as he had to beat Vietnam's world champion Tran Dinh Nam.

It was Alfian, with a bleeding foot but refusing to quit, whose gold was confirmed as the country's 80th. It bore all the hallmarks of Singapore athletes' performance at the 28th Games - that of tenacity and courage.

With 17 golds left in two days of competition, Singapore are unlikely to overtake Thailand, on 87. Third-placed Vietnam, on 73 golds, are unlikely to catch Singapore, who are strong bets to win water polo and squash titles.

A total of 17 different sports have won golds for Singapore, a heartening sign, said Mr Fang. "Hopefully, this will persist... as we continue on our journey to become a truly sporting nation."

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