



ST PHOTOS: MUGILAN RAJASEGERAN

## Gold for Singapore

SINGAPORE'S shooters got the country's Commonwealth Games campaign off to a cracking start yesterday by winning two golds.

Aqilah Sudhir and Jasmine Ser (above) won the women's 50m rifle three-positions pairs title.

Gai Bin (right) and Nigel Lim Swee Hon (far right) had started the ball rolling by topping the men's 50m pistol pairs competition. The pair dedicated their gold to the memory of the late Mrs Lee Kuan Yew.

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# S'PORE'S HOTSHOTS

Rookies overcome personal battles to deliver a pair of golds, with more likely



◆  
"What! I was counting on you."

AQILAH SUDHIR'S reply to partner Jasmine Ser who had said: "I let myself down and was counting on Aqilah."

Singapore shooter Aqilah Sudhir in action in the women's pairs 50m rifle three-positions yesterday afternoon. She won the gold with her teammate Jasmine Ser. ST PHOTO: MUGILAN RAJASEGERAN



ATTHEGAMES

By ABDUL HAFIZ

**NEW DELHI:** Aqilah Sudhir had a warning from judges. Jasmine Ser found her sight getting blurry. Gai Bin started thinking of gold. Only Nigel Lim seemed unperturbed.

In shooting, in which "a blank mind is the perfect state", according to Aqilah, even the slightest distraction can be costly.

Yet, Singapore's shooters, all in their first Commonwealth Games, won their personal battles in their own way to deliver the Republic's first two golds of the New Delhi Games in scintillating fashion.

Aqilah and Jasmine's win in the 50m rifle three-position was doubly impressive given it was a new event for them.

Still, not only did they beat an experienced Indian team which included Tejaswani Sawant, who only two months ago was crowned the world champion in the 50m prone, but they also set a Commonwealth Games record with their combined score of 1,149. The Singapore pair beat the Indians by six points.

"I'm still in shock," said Ser, 20, who talks to herself to shut out the rest of the world from her mind during competition.

Despite the gold, she was unhappy with her performance. In the standing portion of an event where each shooter also has to shoot from prone and kneeling positions, she found her eyesight blurring. She ignored the condition, thinking she could manage it. As it got worse, she resorted to eye drops.

"Then I found I could aim better. But if I had used the drops earlier, my scores

could have been better. I let myself down and was counting on Aqilah," said Ser, who contributed 568 points.

"What! I was counting on you," quipped her partner.

Aqilah, who began the contest with a near-perfect 199 (each shooter gets 20 shots per position, with 10 points for bull's eye) in the opening prone position, was first cautioned by an official for raising her armed rifle too high.

But she still stuck to her routine as it was key in keeping her concentration. She was then given a sterner warning.

"My grandmother advised me to keep reciting a short prayer, and it helped me regain my focus," said the 19-year-old. "Jasmine and I had one aim today - to break the 580 barrier. What mattered was that one of us did."

Aqilah's 581 was a personal best and the day's highest individual score. The next best was Tejaswani's 575.

"How sweet was that," said Chng Seng Mok, the Singapore Shooting Associ-

ation president, who was at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range. "Taking part in this event for the first time, they still beat a far more experienced team who had the benefit of being on home soil."

Earlier in the morning, Gai, despite the experience of having coached On Shaw Ming to Singapore's first Commonwealth Games shooting gold four years ago, became his own worst enemy.

He and partner Lim had gotten off to a hot start, putting up 95 points each and immediately surging into a nine-point lead. Yet in the third series, Gai began to taste victory, prematurely.

"We are only human," he said. He lost focus and shot poorly, for just 85 points.

It was a wake-up call. He calmed himself by listening to his heartbeat slow down. He cleared his mind. He refocused.

Ten shots later, he had put up another impressive 95 points, and Singapore still had a three-point cushion over India's Omkar Singh and Deepak Sharma.

Lim, 31, and Gai, 42, finished with 1,094 points, relegating the Indians (1,087) to silver. Trinidad and Tobago won the bronze on 1,081.

So how did the gold feel in their hands?

"Heavy," said Aqilah, laughing, as she clutched her biggest prize to date.

"Heavy means quality," added Lim, who with his partner Gai won two golds at last year's South-east Asia Games.

Yesterday's golds earned each pair \$120,000 under the Singapore National Olympic Council's Multi-million Dollar Awards Programme.

Any plans on how to spend the bonus? Said Lim: "Right now, I don't need any distractions. My focus is only on shooting well in the individual events."

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## S'pore on course for record haul?

**NEW DELHI:** These Commonwealth Games could bring a record golden haul for Singapore, if the Republic's contingent of 20 shooters keep up yesterday's medal-winning form.

Chng Seng Mok, the Singapore Shooting Association's president, refused to give any predictions, saying: "I need a crystal ball first."

But Singapore have already doubled their best-ever performance in the sport, when On Shaw Ming bagged gold in the men's 25m centre-fire pistol four years ago in Melbourne.

And with 18 events left for Singapore's shooters, including individual events for yesterday's gold winners, and the table tennis team expected to better their four-gold haul in Melbourne, anticipation is rising.

"My heartiest congratulations to the shooting team," said Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports Vivian Balakrishnan. "(Nigel Lim) Swee Hon and Gai Bin's clinching of Team Singapore's first medal - and a gold at that - is a tremendous achievement."

"Aqilah (Sudhir) and Jasmine (Ser) added to the gloss with a wonderful performance in a new Commonwealth Games' record. This is a great start for Team Singapore, and strong inspiration for our athletes to deliver their best at the Games."

Singapore's biggest Commonwealth haul of 18 medals (five golds, six silvers and seven bronzes) came in Melbourne.

ABDUL HAFIZ

### MEDAL TALLY AT PRESS TIME

COUNTRY	G	S	B	T
1 Australia	8	9	5	22
2 India	5	4	2	11
3 England	2	5	4	11
4 South Africa	2	2	1	5
5 Malaysia	2	2	0	4
6 Singapore	2	0	0	2
7 Canada	1	0	4	5
8 Nigeria	1	0	1	2
= Scotland	1	0	1	2
10 New Zealand	0	1	1	2
= Wales	0	1	1	2
12 Bangladesh	0	0	1	1
= Sri Lanka	0	0	1	1
= Trinidad and Tobago	0	0	1	1