

Aqilah takes 10m air rifle gold

■ BY LEONARD LIM

CHAT with Aqilah Sudhir, and chances are the bubbly 17-year-old will be the one doing most of the talking.

But put the Singaporean in an air rifle range, and she quickly shuts out her surroundings and focuses on the target board.

That ability to zero in on the bull's eye and remain composed - even in the most stressful situation - saw Aqilah shoot her way into the history books on Monday in Pune, India.

Her 103 total in the 10-shot final of the Commonwealth Youth Games girls' 10m air rifle event bagged her a gold. It was also Singapore's first shooting success at these Games, now into the third edition.

"I didn't expect so much before this competition," said an excited Aqilah over the telephone yesterday, still trying to come to terms with her feat.

"It was scary looking at the scoring machine when I was shooting."

Combined with her qualifying score of 398, her tally of 501 bettered the 2006 Commonwealth Games gold-medal mark of 500.6.

The world record for qualifying is 400, held by several top shooters. Aqilah's tally was also not far off the world record for total score - 505 (400 + 105) - set by Germany's Sonja Pfeilschifter in May this year.

Aqilah picked up the rifle for the first time just three years ago, when studying at Temasek Secondary School. She has since switched to the Singapore Sports School.

Her 103 score at the Games, for athletes aged 18 and under, is just 0.01 fewer than compatriot Jasmine Ser's gold-medal mark at last year's South-east Asia Games.

Said Aqilah, who is eyeing a place in



Singapore's Aqilah Sudhir (centre) displaying the gold medal she won in the 10m air rifle event at the Commonwealth Youth Games on Monday. PHOTO: COURTESY OF SPENCER TAN

ALL RIGHT

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AQILAH SUDHIR

Singapore's contingent for next year's SEA Games and the 2012 Olympics: "I knew I was doing things right. My breathing was controlled, I kept myself stable and shut out all the noise around me. It all went well."

Second was Canada's Monica Fyfe (final score 496.1). Malaysia's Nur Ayuni Farhana Abdul Hali (492.2) took the bronze.

Aqilah earned praise from Singapore Shooting Association president Chng Seng Mok, who said: "This bodes well for the future, and she is certainly one to watch and groom for the Olympics."

There was more joy for Singapore yesterday when Christopher John Chia won silver in the boys' 10m air pistol event.

His final score of 555 was two points behind Canada's Matthew Hendry. India's Ankush Bhardwaj was third (551).

Over 1,300 athletes from 71 countries are participating in athletics, badminton, boxing, shooting, swimming, table tennis, tennis, weightlifting and wrestling at the Oct 12-18 event.