THIS weekend’s Sundown Marathon will feature 22 handcyclists, the largest contingent the sport has assembled for an endurance race in Asia.

For the first time, six will attempt the full 42.195km marathon. They are Foo Fungliang, 39; Gregory Burns, 54; Michael Ngu, 56; Ezzy Wang, 48; Raja Singh, 55; and Alvina Neo, 22.

Said Foo, who is the president of the Singapore Handcycling Association: “Hand-cycling is still a new sport in Singapore and we hope this will generate more awareness about it.”

Besides the sextet, the handcyclists will also be taking part in the 2km and 12km race.

The youngest of the group, nine-year-old Muhammad Nur Amsyar, will be taking part in the 12km race. He suffers from spina bifida, a birth defect that involves the incomplete development of the spinal cord or its coverings, and it affects the use of his legs.

Said his father, Abdimanaf An- di, 44: “We’ve tried so many other sports, from badminton to archery, but hand-cycling seems to be the best fit for him. It’s made him physically strong and mentally tough. But most importantly, he’s very happy doing it.”

Neo, who is also afflicted with spina bifida, also feels that hand-cycling has given her much to cheer about, having taken up the sport two years ago.

Said the Singapore Institute of Management student: “I always gave myself reasons not to try physical activities. Joining hand-cycling changed that. Now, it’ll be a challenge to find something I won’t try.”

Burns, an American who has won swimming golds in three Paralympic Games, feels that the inclusion of handcyclists this year is “a step in the right direction for Singapore in changing the public’s perception of disabled sports”.

He added: “Hand-cycling is cool, modern and easy. It shows that disabled sports are anything but disabled.”

Rolling their way along the Sundown route