



Competitors from SIM (boat No. 4) in action against SMU (not in picture), NTU (No. 2) and NUS (No. 6) during the Prime Minister's Cup men's final at the Singapore Dragon Boat Festival. Their women's team won their final. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

# Keeping dragon boating afloat

Dragon boating has not managed to become a mainstay at the SEA Games and Asian Games, but the Singapore Dragon Boat Association (SDBA), celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, continues to paddle on to increase the sport's profile.

SDBA president Chia Shi-Lu acknowledged that the omission of

the sport from next month's SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur had been a disappointment to the local fraternity.

The sport featured at the 2015 Singapore Games, where the host won five bronzes. It has been omitted three times (1999, 2001, 2009) since it was introduced at the biennial Games in 1993 and last featured

at the 2010 Asiad.

"It's hard to keep our national team motivated with such a big gap between major competitions," Chia said yesterday at the Singapore Dragon Boat Festival.

"Still, we are trying to send the team to more regional competitions. The team just came back from Hong Kong, where they did pretty well."

The national team finished first at the CCB (Asia) International Open Grand Championship 400m race last month.

Dr Chia, who is an MP for Tanjong Pagar GRC, added that more was also being done on the mass-participation front.

"We're trying to reach out more to schools and younger children. I

myself started in junior college, and we just want to get more students exposed to the sport," he said.

He pointed to a pilot initiative the People's Association launched in April. Called the Children Dragon Boat Orientation Programme, almost 100 pre-school children were introduced to the sport.

They were taught rowing techniques and the role of a drummer at the bow of the boat, all without entering the water.

Yesterday's event at Marina Channel, Gardens by the Bay East, attracted the most participants since 1987, with more than 3,000 rowers from about 40 teams.

The highlight of the day was the Prime Minister's Cup, which pitted university teams against each other

over a distance of 1,000m.

Both the men's and women's races were won by the Singapore Institute of Management.

Men's team vice-captain Lim Ying Jie attributed the win in part to greater race experience.

"We used to take part in just the three big races (Singapore Regatta, DBS Regatta, Prime Minister's Cup), but there have been many more short-course 100m, 200m races available in the last few years," said the 25-year-old accounting student.

"These give us more chances to compete and pace ourselves against the other schools under realistic conditions."

Lester Wong

KEEP THE COMPETITIONS COMING

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DR CHIA SHI-LU, SDBA president, on the challenges the association faces because dragon boating is not a regular fixture at major Games.