

Kiria makes it two for Tokyo

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Kiria Tikanah Abdul Rahman upstaged higher-ranked rivals at the Asia-Oceania Olympic Qualification Tournament yesterday in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, to become the second Singaporean fencer in two days to qualify for the Tokyo Games.

The 20-year-old, ranked 207th in the world, entered the competition seeded sixth in a field of 14, but proved it mattered little as she beat Kazakhstan's world No. 97 Ulyana Balaganskaya 15-13 in the final of the women's epee.

The National University of Singapore undergraduate's success comes a day after teammate Amita Berthier won the women's foil event to seal her spot at the July 23-Aug 8 Games.

Kiria's father Abdul Rahman, 55, was emotional when he spoke to *The Straits Times* over the phone.

Recounting how he felt when she scored the winning point in the final, he said: "I was about to break down. My wife, who is overseas for work, called me

She becomes second Singaporean fencer to qualify for Olympics



Fencer Kiria Tikanah Abdul Rahman chalked up a perfect six victories. TNP FILE PHOTO

and she was breaking down too.

"Every one of us is very proud of her. She's the first Olympian in our family. Praise be to God, this is all God's will."

He added that she had worked tirelessly for months to prepare for the Olympic qualifying tournament.

"Sometimes, she struggles and she complains, grumbling to herself mainly that she has projects and so on," he said.

"But she has been able to juggle. And she trained so hard, almost every day."

Despite her modest seeding, Kiria aced the poules and racked up a perfect six wins, including over over Balaganskaya and third seed Filipina Hanniel Abella (world No. 146).

She then defeated Paria Mahrokh of Iran 15-10 in the quarter-final, before beating Thailand's Korawan Thaneer (world No. 162) 15-12 in the semi-final.

In the final against 27-year-old Balaganskaya, the Singaporean held her nerve after a tit-for-tat battle to end strongly.

Only two Singaporean fencers have competed at the Olympics: James Wong (foil) and Ronald Tan (epee) at the 1992 Barcelona Games. But they did not have to qualify then and earned their berths by virtue of being Singapore's top fencers.

Fencing Singapore president Juliana Seow hailed Kiria and Berthier's qualification, calling it an "amazing achievement" and describing the qualifying competition as "emotional".

"We at Fencing Singapore are ecstatic to have two fencers making history for our nation at this competition," said Seow, who also reserved praise for Henry Koh, who coaches Kiria at the Blade Fencing Club.

In the men's foil, Kevin Jerrold Chan placed sixth out of 17, while in the women's sabre, Jolie Lee finished joint-third among 11 fencers.

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