Foreigners here volunteer for YOG

More than 100 of them will be translators for the Youth Olympics

By Melissa Sim

They may not know where to get the best chicken rice in town or even have "lah" in their vocabulary.

But come August, foreigners who have been calling Singapore home will be featured as the Republic’s faces when the Youth Olympic Games comes to town from Aug 14 to 26.

More than 100 have been tapped to be translators for 4,000 athletes and officials expected here, while some will even try their hand at sports commentating.

And though many of them are not citizens, a chance to be “the face of Singapore” was just too good an opportunity to miss.

Kazakhstani student Ainura Begalinova, 21, for example, came to Singapore last August, and she already feels like the country is her “second home”. She is looking forward to playing ambassador of sorts.

Said the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) computer science student: “I want to provide them with all the information they need about Singapore.”

El Salvadorian Malena Perkmann, 37, said volunteering her time during the Games is her way of giving back to Singapore after staying here for over two years.

“I’m in a safe, clean country that is great for kids and I’m grateful for that,” said the housewife and mother of two. “I don’t want to take advantage of the good things and not give back.”

While the Games’ organising committee said it has achieved its target of language volunteers needed, it is still looking for more people who can speak Russian, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian.

About 500 foreign language volunteers will be needed to ensure a smooth running of the Games. So far, about half are Singaporean, a quarter are foreigners flying in from overseas and the rest are foreigners living here.

They will cover 12 different languages – English, Russian, Spanish, French, Arabic, Portuguese, German, Mandarin, Italian, Korean, Japanese and Malay – which are spoken by the delegations as a first or second language.

Senior youth director of the Singapore Youth Olympic Organising Committee said that language service volunteers provide “an invaluable service to the Olympic Movement and Singapore”.

The volunteers too stand to benefit.

Student Amaya Tanaka-Galdos hopes her experience at the Youth Olympics can help her land a role in the 2012 London Olympics.

“I’m looking forward to the experience,” said the 19-year-old, who holds dual citizenships from Venezuela and Spain and will be a Spanish translator and also a French announcer during the YOG.

“And I’ll be putting my language skills to good use!”,

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