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MALAYSIA WANTS TO STRENGTHEN COMMONWEALTH TIES THROUGH SPORTS MEET

Mahathir - Commonwealth Games

By Zukiman Zain

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 10 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is keen to host the 1998 Commonwealth Games to strengthen ties among member countries, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said like in many areas where countries could help one another and foster links, sports could help enhance ties among the Commonwealth countries.

+Sports is very much a people-to-people thing and through sports the people in the world can get to know one another and create and strengthen the sort of friendly ties that the Commonwealth wants to promote,+ he said when launching the +1998 Commonwealth Games Bid Fund+ at the Merdeka Square here.

He assured Commonwealth Games Federation officials and sports leaders attending the function that Malaysia would do everything it could to make the 1998 Commonwealth Games the best ever.

He said the government fully supported the bid by the Olympic Council of Malaysia and would provide the necessary facilities and funds. -- more

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Mahathir- Commonwealth Games 2 Kuala Lumpur

He said the fund raising campaign was launched to raise money from the public to support the bid while the Commonwealth Games Run, which he flagged off immediately after the ceremony, was a +symbolic gesture+.

Noting the huge crowd despite the steady drizzle throughout the event, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said it reflected the support of the people of +this nation of sports lovers+ to host the games.

+In the space of less than a month from the time a decision was taken to organise the run, we have gathered together this large number of people who have all paid a symbolic two ringgit or US 70 cents each to participate in the run. This is only the beginning,+

He said for the next three months, signatures would be gathered from hundreds of thousands of Malaysians throughout the country together with their contributions to show their support for the Malaysian bid.

He said Malaysia had acquired +a degree of expertise+ after arranging a number of international-level sporting events and would be hosting a number of major ones in the next few years. -- more

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Mahathir- Commonwealth Games 3 (last) Kuala Lumpur

Other than the Thomas Cup, Malaysia would be hosting the World Corporate Games, the World Cup Golf and the World Cup Junior Football in the next few years, he said.

Saying Malaysia was pleased to have successfully staged many sporting events, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir recounted the tremendous support of the people when the country staged the Southeast Asia (SEA) Games two years ago.

+...We had the full support of Malaysians throughout the country and US\$3 million was raised from a torch run which started from Penang in the North and went through various parts of the country,+ he said.

+Our people fully support sports because we believe that sports is a strong unifying factor especially important in a multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious country like ours,+ he said.

He told the Commonwealth sports leaders that if they had the chance to visit the countryside, they could see that there were football fields and other sporting facilities in almost all the towns and villages.

+This is indeed the basis of our sports policy because we feel through sports we can create a united and healthy nation,+ he said. -- Bernama

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