

# Mahathir: Sports can help foster ties

KUALA LUMPUR. Malaysia is very keen to host the 1998 Commonwealth Games because it believes sports can help strengthen ties among the member countries.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday there were many areas in which countries could help one another.

Sports was one such arena where "we can definitely increase and strengthen ties among the Commonwealth countries," he said before the flagging off ceremony for the Support 1998 Commonwealth Games run at Merdeka Square.

Addressing Commonwealth sports leaders and

officials of the Commonwealth Games Federation, Dr Mahathir said:

"Sports is very much a people to people thing and through sports the people of the world can get to know one another and strengthen friendly ties."

The Commonwealth sports leaders are here to attend the opening of the Olympic Council of Malaysia building and to inspect the sporting facilities before a decision on the venue is made.

Thousands of people who have paid a symbolic \$2 each to participate in the run braved a drizzle to witness the ceremony.

More than \$1 million was contributed to the Commonwealth Games

Bid fund which was launched simultaneously.

Dr Mahathir pledged full government support in terms of providing sporting facilities and funds.

"More importantly, we have the full support of our people when we stage these events," he said.

"Our people fully support sports because we believe sports is a strong unifying factor, especially important in a multiracial, multilingual, multicultural and multireligious country like ours.

"If you visit our countryside you will see that we have football fields and other sporting facilities in almost all towns and villages.

"This is indeed the basis of our sports policy because we feel through sports we can create a united nation."

To show the people's support of the Government's bid, signatures and contributions from hundreds of thousands of Malaysians would be gathered over the next three months, said Dr Mahathir.

"I am confident you as sports leaders in the Commonwealth, will appreciate the efforts we are making in bidding for the 1998 Commonwealth Games.

"I can assure you Malaysia will do everything it can to make the 1998 Commonwealth Games the best ever."