

# Conquer the world

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## Time to discard 'village champion' image, says Dr M

By Randhir Singh

MALAYSIAN sportsmen and sportswomen should discard the "village champion" image and strive to become world champions, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

Sportsmen who could only win on home turf would be ridiculed by outsiders, he said when addressing the Singapore-bound Malaysian contingent for the 17th Sea Games at the National Training Camp at the Tenaga Nasional Staff Training Centre in Bangi.

Dr Mahathir spent two hours with the contingent before handing over the Malaysian flag to chef-de-mission Datuk Khalid Yunus.

The Prime Minister said over-dependence on outside forces such as a home crowd does not augur well for sports. "It reminds us of the 1989 Sea Games. We did well winning 67 gold medals but didn't do well in Manila two years later," he said.

"Maybe that's because we didn't have enough supporters to cheer the athletes."

Dr Mahathir said national sportsmen should be physically and spiritually strong and have the self-discipline to attain world class status.

He said self-discipline above everything else ensures success.

"Discipline doesn't mean taking orders from superiors or training as a team. It's the discipline of mind, body and thought that is important. We have to exercise a

hold on it."

He said self-confidence and willpower were essential in sports.

The absence of such qualities often results in sportsmen losing the match despite taking a lead in the early stages of the game, he said.

The Prime Minister said their target should be to emerge as "national champion today, regional champion tomorrow and world champion the day after".

"Each athlete should aspire to be a world champion, perhaps not within reach now, but he should work towards it from now so that the next generation can make it happen," he said.

This objective could be realised provided athletes were highly disciplined, in perfect frame of mind, physically fit and never allow themselves to be overcome by the fear of losing, he said.

Dr Mahathir said national athletes should not depend on fan support to boost their spirit but rely instead on intrinsic push to win a title.

"If we expect our fans' support to weaken our opponents, the real winners are not the players but the crowd that gives the support," he said.

He told the 500-odd athletes and officials that the country has great hopes on them.

"Though it is a sporting event it involves the country's image. The responsibilities you shoulder are as heavy as those borne by others in the various other fields."