

24/08/1997

Main Sukom venue will be even better (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The cost of building the national sports complex in Bukit Jalil, the main venue for the 1998 Commonwealth Games, has increased by almost RM300 million due to changes and additional facilities.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said several changes and enhancements were made to the indoor stadium and swimming pool which resulted in the higher costs.

"Actually, it is not cost overrun. Just that we made some changes ... there were many additions.

"There is an increase of almost RM300 million due to the enhancements," said Dr Mahathir when he visited the complex today.

He said the changes included an increase in the seating capacity of the indoor stadium from 8,000 to 13,000, and the inclusion of a roof for the swimming arena.

The cost of the main stadium, indoor stadium and swimming pool has now gone up to RM747 million.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would bear the additional costs, not the contractors, United Engineers (M) Bhd.

He said the entire complex, including the Games Village, the hockey stadium, squash stadium, external works and infrastructure works, will cost RM2 billion.

"That makes it the single biggest sports complex project other than South Korea's for the 1988 Olympics. The open stadium is one of the biggest in Asia with 100,000 capacity."

Dr Mahathir was speaking after a briefing and a tour of the complex. He was accompanied by Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Sukom Ninety Eight executive chairman Jen (Rtd) Tan Sri Hashim Mohamed Ali, UEM chairman Tan Sri Radin Soenarno and Renong executive chairman Tan Sri Halim Saad.

He expressed satisfaction with the progress so far and said that UEM has promised to deliver the complex on Jan 1, 1998, nine months before they are contractually obliged to do so.

On the management of the complex, Dr Mahathir said the Government was looking towards a professional set-up with proper expertise and back-up.

"This is not an ordinary sports facility that can be managed by a small sports club or part-timers. It must be managed by professionals with necessary experience and expertise."

On the overseas promotion and publicity for the Games, Dr Mahathir said it was going smoothly.

"It's moving well. We have to build it up to crescendo. You can't just suddenly go 100 per cent then maintain it ... it's difficult. Begin small, then progress."

On the haze and whether it can hamper the staging of the Games, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was in the midst of discussions with Indonesia to resolve the problem.

He said the Government might consider artificial rain to help solve the problem but dismissed the idea of a change in dates for the Games scheduled for Sept 11-21 next year.

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