

'Produce good athletes first'^{3/}

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KUALA LUMPUR: The country must produce world class athletes before bidding to host the Olympic Games, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said it was not enough to have good facilities. "We must also have world class athletes so there would be keener competition," he said.

He said representatives from countries taking part in the Kuala Lumpur Games, including Commonwealth Federation president Prince Edward, were impressed by what they saw at the opening.

"They not only expressed their satisfaction at what they saw (on Friday night) but they said we are capable enough to host the Olympics," Dr Mahathir said after touring the Corporate Hospitality Village at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil yesterday.

"Maybe one day we can play host," he said, adding that the government would consider bidding for the Olympics of 2008.

"We know there is already a host for the 2000 Games (Sydney, Australia) and the 2004 Games in Athens.

"But bids for the 2008 Games have not been called. I think there would be many countries which are interested in hosting the Olympics," he said.

Dr Mahathir said despite the initial worries that things could go wrong at the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Games on Friday night, he was happy and satisfied that everything went smoothly.

"At first, I was worried about rain spoiling the show or if a blackout occurred. (But it turned out to be) a superb show," he said.

Later in the evening, Dr Mahathir held a dinner reception for Games Federation officials at a leading hotel here.

Among the guests were Prince Edward, chairman Michael Fennel and Commonwealth secretary-general Chief Emeka Anyaoku.

Also present, were Dr Mahathir's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Sukom Ninety Eight Berhad executive chairman Tan Sri Hashim Mohd Ali, ministers and high commissioners of Commonwealth countries in Malaysia.