

11 JUL 1998

Games-Complex

DAZZLING OPENING FOR BUKIT JALIL NATIONAL SPORTS COMPLEX

KUALA LUMPUR, July 11 (Bernama) -- To the fanfare of trumpets and dancing laser beams, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad opened the National Sports Complex in Bukit Jalil here tonight to catapult Malaysia into the ranks of a world-class sports infrastructure nation and a future Olympics host.

In two months' time, the RM800 million world class complex will serve as the hub of the 16th Commonwealth Games here from Sept 11 to 21, which will be opened by Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar and closed by the Head of the Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth.

The dazzling opening ceremony, televised "live" by RTM, was staged in the jewel of the complex, the 100,000-capacity main stadium that was officially named Stadium Nasional by the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir also announced the names of other facilities at the complex, Stadium Hoki Nasional, Pusat Akuatik Nasional, Pusat Skuasy Nasional and the indoor stadium as Stadium Putra.

The indoor stadium for netball and lawn bowls centre at the Bukit Kiara Sports Complex in the outskirts of the federal capital and located about 20km from the National Sports Complex were called Stadium Juara and Pusat Boling Padang Nasional respectively.

After watching a pop concert featuring one of the biggest ever gatherings of local artistes and groups led by diva Ella, and Hindi singer Sudesh Bhosle of India, Dr Mahathir signed a plaque at the base of a giant "keris" structure outside the main stadium to commemorate the occasion.

Earlier in the evening, the Prime Minister commissioned the Star Light Rail Transit (LRT) system at the Sukan Negara Station in the Bukit Jalil National Sports Complex. The link from the city to Bukit Jalil is the main transport artery and is expected to ferry thousands of sports fans to the complex to watch the Commonwealth Games and other events in the future.

Also present at the ceremony were the Prime Minister's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and his wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin. The 120-hectare complex was built by United Engineers (M) Bhd in exchange for the land where Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara are located in the heart of the city.

The Bukit Jalil complex, about 20km south of the capital, marks the coming of age of Malaysian sports. It had taken 25 years to realise the dream of a national sports complex mooted by second Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak in 1973.

The crowd began streaming into the stadium early and were entertained by a pop concert that began at 5 pm.

Dr Mahathir arrived at the complex by taking the LRT ride from the Jalan Sultan Ismail LRT station. He took over the wheel of the train midway and was driven from the station to the grand entrance of the main stadium by an NGV-powered taxi developed by Petronas.

As he entered the arena of the stadium, nine athletes led by tenpin bowling darling Shalin Zulkifli, who was holding a lit torch, jogged up to the VVIP box. The other athletes were lawn bowlers Nor Hashimah Ismail and Mohd Effendy Tan Abdullah, netballers Siti Afizah Mohd Noh and Wong Mee Yee, tenpin bowler Ben Heng, long jumper Mohd Zaki Sadri, woman walker Anastasia Karen Anne Raj and weightlifter Mohamed Hidayat.

Dr Mahathir received the torch from Shalin and proceeded to light a

specially constructed cauldron in front of the VVIP box before declaring open the complex.

As the sounds of the "rebana ubi" reverberated through the stadium, 20,000 balloons were released, laser rays swirled inside the oval-shaped stadium and fireworks soared into the air.

On a stage in the centre of the field, Ella broke into a Malay rendition of the catchy "Standing in the Eyes of the World".

The song was specially composed for the occasion by Malaysian composer Wah Idris and singer-composer David Gates of the now defunct Bread fame as a tribute to the Prime Minister and other Malaysian leaders for taking Malaysia to the world stage.

Dr Mahathir was presented with a musical score of the song, a sketching of the main stadium and a replica of the key to the main stadium as souvenirs.

For the next hour, Dr Mahathir joined the rest of the crowd to watch the pop concert kicked off by M. Nasir.

The Prime Minister, his deputy and their wives went on stage to join Ella and Ning Baizura to sing "Standing in the Eyes of the World" to big applause from the crowd.

The other artistes who made it a dazzling night to remember included Siti Nurhaliza, Ziana Zain, Nora, Camellia, former Search vocalist Amy, Awie, Jay Jay and the Raihan and Innuendo groups.

The facilities at the complex will undergo tests for the Commonwealth Games in five sports -- track and field, aquatics, squash, gymnastics and men's hockey.

The Asian Squash Championships began at the squash centre today while the main stadium will be the venue for the Malaysian Open athletics championships tomorrow, which has attracted 11 foreign teams including Commonwealth countries Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Mauritius and Brunei.

-- BERNAMA  
RAZ TCL SHY