

04/10/1998

Dr M: You did us proud (HL)

Ashraf Abdullah; Azrani Rustam

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight paid tribute to Malaysians for making the 1998 Commonwealth Games the best ever, saying that they had set a very high standard for others to follow.

The Prime Minister said the 16th Commonwealth Games, the first to be held in an Asian country, would not have been a success if all those involved did not work hard.

He was addressing those directly or indirectly involved in the Games, including volunteers, athletes and officials, during a dinner in their honour at Stadium Nasional in Bukit Jalil.

Dr Mahathir said the success of the Games, the biggest sporting event after the Olympics, proved that Malaysians had the ability to organise big events.

The Games, from Sept 11 to 21, involved more than 5,000 athletes from 70 countries. It had the largest ever participation. The only other developing country which organised the Games was Jamaica in 1966.

Dr Mahathir said even the organisers of the Commonwealth Games in Manchester in 2002 had admitted that Malaysia's high standard of organisation would be difficult to follow.

He said Malaysia had even managed to elevate the status of the Games, once of little significance in the international sporting arena.

He said without the participation of the volunteers, the Games would not have been a success.

"It is easy to build stadiums and other facilities, but it would not have been easy to organise this meet without the efforts of the volunteers. We are very proud of you. You displayed the true spirit of Malaysia Boleh."

Dr Mahathir said the nation was also very proud of its athletes. "We did not expect to win 10 gold medals. This is a record. I personally did not have much confidence. I thought we could win three, or at the most six.

"But we have proven that we can excel in future international sport meets. Your achievements were extraordinary," he told the athletes, adding that it was beyond anyone's dream that Malaysia emerged fourth in the medal tally.

He also commended Malaysians in general who spent time and money to witness the Games, saying this was a true display of sportsmanship.

He said Malaysians, who were not directly involved in the organisation of the Games, had also played their role by ensuring that visitors left the country with sweet memories.

"I am proud of you. We have showed the world that we not only can develop the nation to be one of the most advanced developing countries, but one which excels as a great sporting nation."

He also thanked former Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Annuar Musa, his successor Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Datuk Bandar Tan Sri Kamaruzzaman Sharif, officials of the ministry and Sukom Ninety Eight Bhd, the police and the armed forces for their contributions.

He later presented the National Sports Council's cash rewards, totalling RM2.2 million, to those who won medals in the Games. Each gold medallist received RM80,000 (team members will share the money), silver (RM40,000) and bronze (RM20,000).

Malaysia bagged 10 gold, 14 silver and 12 bronze medals to finish behind Australia, England and Canada. It was the country's best ever haul in the

history of the Games.

Dr Mahathir also presented national shooter Nurul Hudda Bahrin and weightlifter Hidayat Hamidon with a Proton Perdana each for breaking the Games record in their respective events. Nurul Hudda took the women's air rifle individual category with a grand total of 494.8 points. Her Proton Perdana bears the registration number Sukom 494.

Hidayat lifted 167.5kg in the 69kg clean and jerk category. His Proton Perdana carries the registration number Sukom 167.

Malaysia also won its first ever athletics gold medal through G. Saravanan in the 50km walk.

(END)