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### Embracing Malaysia Boleh spirit

TEN golds may seem too few to share with 20 million people, but every Malaysian must be imagining a medal around his or her neck. Of course, not many had expected their sportsmen and women to do half as well in the first place. Fewer still would have dreamt that the country's first effort at organising the second largest sporting event on Earth to be such a success. And this triumph is sweeter still as the country faces one of its most trying periods. There is the regional financial crisis that is still raging after more than 14 months and the need to ensure that newly-installed capital controls work to expedite recovery. Then there's the political drama being played out in the presence of over 5,000 athletes and 2,000 international press people following the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from the Government and Umno about a week before the first group of Commonwealth Games officials started arriving.

For all the negative criticism and pessimism before the Games, and the events that kept unfolding as the Games progressed, everyone involved now has little doubt now that the next host will have a tough act to follow in hosting the 17th Games in four years' time. As for Malaysia, the country has proved that it can and does have the ability to host major world events. Neither the money spent to organise the event, nor the determination to make the Games a runaway success for the Government and the people, has been small. In terms of economics and business, the 11-day event has been the impetus for developing billions of ringgit worth of infrastructure and facilities. This has included not only new stadiums and venues, but a new airport, Light Rail Transit system, and many hotels, some of which are five-star. In terms of participation, Malaysia did better than expected.

So why not bring on the Olympics? Yes, why not, indeed. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who had quietly visited many of the venues as the Games were in progress, has hinted of a possible bid by Malaysia for the greatest world sports event in the year 2008. This means by the year 2020, Malaysians would probably host the Olympics. But as Dr Mahathir rightly pointed out, the ability to host the Olympics is not the only concern, Malaysians must be able to compete with the best in the world. We will need more than one Sapok Biki to impress the world and our 21st century successor to Watson Nyambek must regularly clock less than 10 seconds when running the 100m. That is not beyond reach, if we continue to embrace the Malaysia Boleh spirit. Note: the 10 gold medals the nation won at the KL Games are only two short of the total gold medal tally of Malaysia in the last 15 Games. If we can repeat that leap in achievement and faith, there is no stopping us from conquering the Commonwealth Games in future and, perhaps, be worthy contenders at the Olympics. The first gold has yet to be won at that meet.

But first, let us come to terms on what may be needed to build up future teams of sportswomen and men that are of world and Olympic class. Our education system will have to place greater emphasis on physical education. Enrolment into universities should give some kind of priority to Malaysians who excel in sports. In the US, this system has produced great athletes - men and women - and has helped place Americans on the list of great names in the sports world. Malaysia has proven many times that it can do what it sets out to do, the Commonwealth being the latest example of the nation's many incredible feats. Malaysians have in the last

couple of years scaled the highest mountain and trekked the coldest continent on Earth.

The Commonwealth has been a resounding success at the most difficult of times, and this is a fact that should not be forgotten. Yet there are some quarters who think we would not be able to play host to forums like the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) later this year because of some perceived political turmoil that is occurring at probably the peak of difficult economic times. We ask these quarters to check Malaysia's track record, the peace that has been maintained at the most volatile of economic times, the spirit of its people to succeed, and the determination of this country to bounce back. The Commonwealth may not be the Olympics, but it's a step away.

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