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Don't make us fodder for media vultures

THE message was very clear. A timely wake-up call for all concerned. For every Malaysian.

The success of the Commonwealth Games, just 129 days away, depends on ALL of us even if it simply means buying a ticket to watch an event or cheering the Malaysian athletes from the confines of your living room.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad may have been addressing the 10,000 volunteers at the Mines Exhibition Centre on Sunday when he urged them to demonstrate their patriotism and strive to make the Games the best ever. But those words were surely meant for all of us.

"The success of the Games depends on you. Let's together make it the best Commonwealth Games ever held," the Prime Minister said to the loud cheers and applause from the volunteers.

And how do we ensure that it is going to be the best ever?

Well, like Dr Mahathir said, making sure that the Games are well organised is not enough. We have to make sure that those who visit Malaysia during the Games return home with fond memories of our country.

It doesn't take much to tarnish that image as we much-travelled Malaysians well know. What may be minor eyesores to us, like dirty toilets, foodstalls, streets, uncollected rubbish, are major turnoffs to most Westerners who will form the bulk of the tourists expected for the Games.

The Games offer us this great opportunity to stop taking things for granted and educate ourselves in simple, but vital, matters like hygiene, water, the air and the such. Things we mustn't pull a curtain over for the Games and forget about later.

For these 'home improvements' will be beneficial to us in our own progression and evolution.

To do that, we must overcome our natural aversions, hypocrisies and bigotry even if it means having to do things which runs against the grain of our very existence.

Things like getting your hands dirty picking up other people's rubbish and cleaning the toilets. For the country is our home and every citizen has a duty to keep it as clean as he would his own abode.

For simply put, it will take an effort to make the Games a success. Fabulous venues and facilities alone will not achieve that. The human face we put on must be a caring, honest and sincere one as well.

The Games will be more than a window to Malaysia, it will also be our coming of age party when we show new levels of maturity, tolerance and civic consciousness.

For we will not be deceiving the world with facades and pretense couched in hypocrisy. This will only make the flaws all the more obvious.

The Games must be the dawning of that realisation.

It is therefore important not only for the volunteers, but every Malaysian to safeguard the country's image and make the event a success.

The volunteers and general public aside, the Games organisers will also have to make sure there are no embarrassing glitches, no matter how small, once the Games are underway.

For the human tendency is to remember the faults and the inconveniences, never mind the overall euphoria and joy the Games may generate.

The Atlanta Olympics are a recent enough example. There was as much, if not more, written about the bungles and fumbles than the spectacle itself.

The problems with the results and transport systems earned Atlanta the unflattering nickname of the 'Cockup Games'.

We don't want that after putting in so much into these Games.

Given the kind of relationship that our country has with the foreign media, it would be inviting a feeding frenzy of sorts.

The escalating pace of preparations will only get more hectic as the hour approaches.

Dr Mahathir's call to the athletes to make the necessary sacrifices to achieve higher standards and do the nation proud should also be heeded.

These are tough times and the rewards may not be as bountiful, but the athletes owe it to themselves to excel to the best of their abilities. Anything less than their best would be a cop-out, to themselves, the sport and the nation.

Sukom, the Sports Ministry and the athletes are the main players whose roles are clearly defined and, let us hope, clearly understood.

For their efforts to gell, all of them must put aside their petty peeves and jealousies to make sure that Malaysia Boleh.

There is an American saying that 'Heroes are made in overtime.'

For in that moment of greatest need, with the deadline almost up and the work still not quite complete, is when those heroic men and women rise to the occasion and get the job one.

Let's hope this doesn't happen to the KL Games. That Sukom and the Sports Ministry do the necessary with time to spare, the inevitable last-minute glitches notwithstanding, of course.

For, heroes or otherwise, it is hell paying overtime in these trying times.

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