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Games-Mahathir

INVESTMENT IN SPORTS NOT WASTED, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, July 11 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia's investment in sports will not be wasted because it will create a physically and mentally healthy society, which will in turn contribute towards moulding a successful nation.

The Prime Minister said investment in sports also brought high returns to the nation through the inculcation of fighting spirit, perseverance, determination and commitment in the people besides instilling self-discipline and noble values.

"Although what is important now is winning in whatever way possible, nevertheless sporting spirit must not be discarded," he said when officiating the RM800 million National Sports Complex at Bukit Jalil tonight.

In the opening speech at the main stadium which can accommodate 100,000 people, the Prime Minister said sports would also become an industry that would contribute to the country's economic development because popular sporting events had commercial potential in advertising, television broadcast, radio, magazines, newspapers, sports wear and various sporting equipment.

"At the same time, athletes have the opportunity to command high income and in fact become rich as a professional sportsman," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the National Sports Complex would not have been built if it could not bring in returns from sporting and other events held there.

According to him, Malaysia was fortunate for deciding to build the sports complex before the economic woes had set in, otherwise, the construction cost would have been very much higher.

"If we were to build the complex now, its cost would definitely increase many fold, in fact we would certainly not be able to afford it," he said.

The opening of the majestic and state-of-the-art National Sports Complex did not only reflect Malaysia's determination to make the 16th Commonwealth Games as the most spectacular sporting event but also to turn it into a symbol for excellence in sports which would hopefully become a national culture.

He was confident that Malaysians were capable of successfully hosting the Commonwealth Games, the second biggest sporting event in the world after the Olympic Games.

The 16th Commonwealth Games is scheduled to be held here from Sept 11 to 21.

The Prime Minister said it was not easy to manage such a massive event because physical facilities alone were insufficient to ensure its success.

"Malaysia can do it if we are confident that we are capable," Dr Mahathir said.

What was important, he said, was efficiency in managing the games, the first ever being hosted by a Commonwealth member country in Asia.

He said cooperation between everyone involved was important in managing such a major event, especially during the duration of the actual meet.

Dr Mahathir said as the Commonwealth Games was being participated by all the ethnic races in the six continents in the world, namely Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, South America and Oceania, Malaysians would be able to see almost all the top athletes in the world in action.

At the ceremony, Dr Mahathir also announced the new names for the

facilities at the complex known as the National Sports Complex, that is, the main stadium is now named Stadium Nasional, the indoor stadium is named Stadium Putra and the swimming complex is now called the National Aquatic Centre.

The Hockey Stadium will be known as the National Hockey Stadium, the squash stadium known as the National Squash Centre and a hill near the National Sports Complex will be called Bukit Komanwel.

Two facilities at the Bukit Kiara Sports Complex were also given new names, that is, Stadium Juara for the indoor stadium and National Lawn Bowls Centre for the lawn bowls complex.

Earlier, when commissioning the Light Rail Transit (STAR-LRT) system from the city centre to Bukit Jalil, Dr Mahathir said the successful completion of the STAR-LRT system ahead of schedule to herald the Commonwealth Games had proven that Malaysian companies were capable of shouldering heavy responsibility.

The STAR-LRT service is the main transportation system that is expected to ferry sports fans to the National Sports Complex to watch the Commonwealth Games.

Dr Mahathir said the mass public transport system was the most important mode of transport for a big city like Kuala Lumpur which had a population of more than two million now.

He said Kuala Lumpur should actually have one light rail system only but because local investors were smaller, and lacked capital and experience, four systems owned by separate companies had to be created.

Dr Mahathir said the STAR-LRT faced a major test with regard to its capability and efficiency when ferrying passengers to the National Sports Complex.

"Treat it as a challenge and make sure that all sections function smoothly and well.

"Remember that there will be many foreign visitors using the transit system and what they see will be a reflection of Malaysia as host to the Commonwealth Games," he said.

-- BERNAMA  
RAZ MAI AO