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PM: Visitors can help give true picture

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he hoped visitors to the Commonwealth Games would help correct the image of Malaysia painted by the "less friendly of the international media".

He said they would have the opportunity to ascertain for themselves the truth of the situation.

"We are sorry that negative reports about Malaysia and the Games we have organised still persists.

"We hope that the presence of so many people who would otherwise not visit Malaysia will help correct the image of Malaysia that has been painted by the less friendly of the international media," Dr Mahathir said when opening the Commonwealth Games Federation general meeting today.

Present were CGF president Prince Edward, chairman Michael Fennell, honorary treasurer and acting secretary Austin Sealy, Commonwealth secretary-general Chief Emeka Anyaoku, Olympic Council Malaysia president Tan Sri Hamzah Abu Samah and Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

He said as a measure of Malaysia's commitment to the Games and its seriousness in keeping its promises, it had completed all facilities and preparations for the Games despite losing "several hundred billions of US dollars" due to speculation by currency traders and stock market players.

Dr Mahathir said he hoped the visitors, after seeing for themselves the effort of developing a large piece of vacant land into a full-fledged sports complex, would agree that Malaysia had tried to keep the promises it had made.

Dr Mahathir said a victory for Malaysia at the Games would come in the form of its good name being carried and in the sweet memories of its foreign guests who had come to witness the biggest sporting event it had ever hosted.

"The Games is of course not just about winning medals, even though major world records are expected to be broken here.

"Victory comes in many ways, transcending social and ethnic barriers," he said.

He also hoped the old sporting spirit would permeate the Games, although sports today was seriously about winning and national pride.

Winning, he said, was important but the camaraderie and spirit of friendly competition should still be valued.

"In a world so full of bitterness and conflicts, we really don't need to bring these into the playing fields as well," he said.

Touching on the many firsts already scored by this Games, he said Malaysia might not receive any medals but had achieved many firsts.

"This Commonwealth Games is the first ever held in Asia, the first to be opened by the constitutional monarch of a non-British Commonwealth country, the first to feature team sports, and the first Games to receive unprecedented Government support at every level. But that is not all.

"The Kuala Lumpur 98 is also the first to use the latest information technology for the games and results management systems.

"It is also the first to set up a host news agency for the organisation of a sporting event and in the history of the Commonwealth Games, and Kuala Lumpur makes its mark as the first Games with 100 per cent turnout, including a new comrade in the Commonwealth Games Federation, Kiribati."

Kiribati comprises a group of 33 islands in the central Pacific.

In welcoming all to the Games, Dr Mahathir said he was very happy that countries which had never taken part in past games had decided to participate even if it meant sending fewer than 10 sportsmen.

"Kuala Lumpur 98 welcomes all of you and we will cheer for you all the way," he said.

In their speeches, both Anyaoku and Fennell said the facilities built by Malaysia were world class and expressed confidence that the Games would be a tremendous success.

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