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KL 2008

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PRIME MINISTER Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday said Malaysia would bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games now that they have successfully staged the 16th Commonwealth Games.

He said Kuala Lumpur would 'register its willingness' with the International Olympic Committee to host the world's biggest sports festival.

"I doubt whether we can succeed (in our bid) but we will make a bid anyway," he said when asked if Malaysia would make a bid.

Dr Mahathir said there are, however, certain strict conditions before a country can play hosts.

"Like the need to have a good number of athletes to compete against world-class sportsmen and women. We cannot just be hosts with no participation," he said at a Press conference after visiting the Games' Main Press Centre at the Mint Hotel.

"This is a little bit more difficult to produce than building stadiums."

International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch said during his visit to Malaysia last week that to host the Olympics, a nation needed not only good facilities but also a sizeable number of world-class athletes.

Sydney will host the 2000 Olympics while Athens are the hosts in 2004.

Meanwhile, Dr Mahathir praised the Malaysian contingent, saying they had done well by surpassing the medal target set for them.

The Malaysian athletes were set a target of seven gold medals, which they have achieved on the penultimate day of competition.

Two more gold medals are assured on the final day today - from the all-Malaysian men's singles and doubles badminton finals.

"I did not expect them to win that many medals, especially gold," said Dr Mahathir.

"I was rather pessimistic and thought we would have enough problems being hosts and won't be able to win medals."

Dr Mahathir said the Games had gone on much better than expected.

"Somebody told me that they regret the Games is coming to an end tomorrow. Everybody seems to be enjoying themselves."

The Prime Minister said he was seriously thinking of declaring a public holiday as a reward for the successful staging of the Games and the good performance of the Malaysian contingent.

"I do not know when but (ideally) on Saturday so that everyone will have a long weekend. But I might have to declare an earlier date, perhaps mid-week."