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Mahathir: Safeguard country's image during Games

Adeline Ong

IT IS crucial to safeguard the country's image to ensure the success of the 16th Commonwealth Games, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He said that it was important for volunteers to constantly protect the country's image to ensure that foreign visitors returned home with a picture that Malaysia and Malaysians are civilised.

"I also hope that as volunteers they will not object to any task assigned to them on the grounds that it is beneath them.

"Volunteers should also be polite even when dealing with rude visitors. Volunteers must not forget that they come forward with open hearts to serve in order to make the Games a success," he said.

Dr Mahathir addressed some 5,000 volunteers of the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The Prime Minister added that the volunteers hold a huge responsibility as their actions mirror the country's character and spirit.

"Our actions are important to ensure that the world respects us. We built this nation with our hard work until we are able to host the Games. We must not do anything to mar the image," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that the volunteerism culture should be cultivated among Malaysians so that the nation is respected by the world.

"A race is not developed and respected and does not have high honour if its culture is so low that it is not willing to do volunteer work.

"The success of such a big sporting event depends on its management, the country's capability to provide various sports facilities and the athletes' performance.

"However, the role of volunteers shows our dedication, our nation's success and therefore, I believe those who offered themselves as volunteers reflect Malaysians' patriotic spirit," he said, adding that any duty performed by the volunteers is a noble task.

Dr Mahathir also thanked the many volunteers who had offered their services to the Games which will be held from September 11 to 21. Up to date, there are some 51,023 volunteers.

Meanwhile, Dr Mahathir advised the national athletes to devote their time and energy to their training to achieve success at the games.

"I urge and appeal to athletes to sacrifice by putting aside anything that will not contribute to their success.

"From now until the end of the Games, athletes must focus 100 per cent of their energy for the Games," he said.

He added that although Malaysia's success in its bid to host the Games was itself something to be proud of, Malaysia as a host does not want to be left behind in the medals tally.

"Although physically we may be smaller than other athletes, there are still areas - such as weight-lifting, badminton, boxing and swimming - which we have a chance in winning," he said.

The Prime Minister also reminded volunteers and Malaysians in general to ensure that everything is kept clean during the Games.

"Although there are 100,000 spectators at the stadium, we must keep it clean even if we have to pick up rubbish with our bare hands. Cleanliness reflects national character.

"It is also important to maintain cleanliness of toilets not only at the sports complexes but also in public places," he said.

Dr Mahathir also launched the Kuala Lumpur 98 Souvenir Card to commemorate the Games. The Souvenir Card entitles cardholders to guaranteed discounts at over 6,000 participating ordinary merchants throughout the country. The card will be available at RM10 per piece.

The Souvenir Cards will be on sale immediately after the launch at various outlets which include main outlets of Pos Malaysia, branches of Bank Simpanan Nasional, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut and Ayamas restaurant outlets.

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