

11 SEP 1998

Games-Opening (Sukom)

MALAYSIA PLEDGES TO MAKE COMMONWEALTH GAMES BEST EVER

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 11 (Bernama) -- Sukom Ninety Eight Berhad executive chairman Tan Sri Hashim Mohd Ali tonight pledged to make the 16th Commonwealth Games here, the last to be held this century, the best Games to be held this millennium.

"It is a great honour for Malaysia, the first Asian country, to host the Kuala Lumpur Games, and we will make it the best Games to be held this millennium," he said in his speech before the Games was opened by Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Jaafar in a glittering ceremony at the National Stadium.

Hashim also paid tribute to the people of Malaysia and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for their support and also hailed the 20,000 volunteers for their services to help make the Games a success.

Expressing his appreciation to Dr Mahathir for his "untiring support and endless support," Hashim said: "I do believe his personal involvement in the preparation of the Games gave us the added courage in battling the challenges that faced us."

Hashim said Dr Mahathir's unannounced visits to the various venues whilst under construction during weekends or public holidays had kept the organising committee on its toes.

"Last but not least allow me to thank the people of Malaysia, young and old, men and women, for their wonderful support. You gave us the added inspiration and commitment to make the Games the best ever," he added.

Bidding a warm "Selamat Datang" to a record 5,000 athletes and officials from 70 countries gathered here, Hashim welcomed the return of Fiji to the Games and congratulated Cameroon, Mozambique and Kiribati for attending the Games for the first time.

Dr Mahathir and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali were among the VIP guests. Also in the Royal box were the Sultan of Brunei and Fijian Prime Minister General Sitiveni Rabuka.

Hashim also asked the foreign athletes to see as much of Malaysia as possible while pursuing medals and to take home good memories of Malaysia and its people.

As host, Malaysia has prepared international facilities for the Games with state-of-the-art equipment, many of which are being used for the first time in the Commonwealth Games, he said.

Hashim said that despite Asia's economic downturn, Malaysia had built sports facilities which were among the best in the region and comparable to those elsewhere in the world.

He expressed confidence that with the facilities and resources available, Malaysia will be able to host other Games or single sports championship.

-- BERNAMA

TM SHY