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Games-Olympics

MALAYSIA PREPARED TO HOST OLYMPICS (pix)

By: Shahrullizan Rusli & Hamzah Jamaluddin

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 11 (Bernama) -- International Olympic Committee Juan Antonio Samaranch has offered to send a task force from Malaysia to the IOC headquarters in Switzerland to help the country make long-term plans to host the Olympic Games in the future.

This was disclosed by Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin who said Samaranch had given his support after touring the facilities at the National Sports Complex at Bukit Jalil here.

Muhyiddin did not say when Malaysia would host the Olympics but added that preparations were being made.

"For the Commonwealth Games, we started preparations from as early as 1991," he said in an effort to demonstrate that it took a long time to organise such a major sports gathering.

But Muhyiddin said Samaranch also said Malaysia needed to raise the quality of its national athletes.

"Besides being the hosts, athletes from the national team must be of international standard," he said.

Both Muhyiddin and Samaranch also discussed about hosting the Asian Games and the capability of women athletes.

Samaranch also called on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the latter's office today. He was accompanied by Olympic Council of Malaysia president, Tan Sri Hamzah Abu Samah.

"We are prepared to host the 2006 Asian Games and we are trying to convince the IOC that India should allow us a chance to be the hosts," said Muhyiddin. India had hosted the Asian Games before.

The minister said facilities at the National Sports Complex have improved from this year and when the sports facilities in the Klang Valley were taken into consideration, a lot more events can be held.

Referring to the standard of women athletes, he said efforts were being developed to raise their standard.

He admitted that weaknesses in the standard of women athletes would mean a big loss to the country and cited the example of badminton in that Malaysia could have won all the badminton golds at stake if its women players were as good as the men.

Meanwhile, Melbourne, which is bidding to host the 18th Commonwealth Games in 2006, hoped that it could provide the same level of facilities as Malaysia.

Victoria's Premier Jeff Kennet said he was impressed with the facilities at the Bukit Jalil Sports Complex and was confident that those involved in the Games would be satisfied with the facilities.

"I am also impressed with the KLIA (KL International Airport in Sepang) whose architectural design should be appreciated as an art form," he told reporters after calling on Dr Mahathir.

-- BERNAMA

SLR HJ SHY