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Mazlan: Bid can be a PR exercise for the country

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IT may not be a bad idea to use the bid for the 2008 Olympics as a vehicle to promote Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia.

"I think when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad spoke about the bid, he had that in mind," said Datuk Mazlan Ahmad, director-general of the National Sports Council.

"The idea of Malaysia bidding for the Olympics should be seen in a wider perspective. Even before you can get the Games, the bidding exercise which lasts for four years is an excellent PR exercise for a country to promote itself. You can sell your country to the world."

Mazlan's argument gives a new twist to the growing debate on whether Malaysia should bid for the 2008 Olympics.

Sparked by Dr Mahathir's remarks that Malaysia may go for it, after the successful staging of the Commonwealth Games, several sports officials were of the view that it may not be feasible.

They argued that Malaysia should concentrate on the 2006 Asian Games, which they will be bidding, too.

Uppermost in their minds was the cost factor and the current economic downturn faced by the country.

It'd cost a bidding city RM100mil - an estimate based on a IOC marketing study which provides figures of past bids.

"We need not spend that much. But just registering for the bid would mean a lot to us. Each time a mention is made of the 2008 bid, Kuala Lumpur will get a mention," said Mazlan.

"The wide media coverage would be a boost. We can use the five-year exercise to promote the country. Imagine, having promotional booths on Malaysia and its 2008 bid at all major events around the world."

Mazlan said it has been proven, as in the case of Beijing and Cape Town, in the wide publicity they got from bidding for the Games. An impressive audio-visual, brochures, and intelligent marketing can help promote the country.

Even without the bid, the Government, through Tourism Malaysia, spends millions each year to promote the country.

So the bid can be one avenue or a new method to promote the country. Even if we don't get the Games, the four-year bid drive would have helped promote the country as a tourist destination.

As for the budget, Mazlan said Malaysia need not spend RM100mil. It can plan its campaign based on a more reasonable figure.

"It depends on what you want. What kind of message you want to send to the world."

While the nation basks in glory over the success of the Commonwealth Games and with officials in an orgy of self-congratulation, perhaps the time has come to reassess the weaknesses.

Whether we have what it takes to stage the Olympics.

Olympic Council of Malaysia vice-president Datuk Dr P.S. Nathan and former Malaysian AAU deputy president Datuk Dr M. Jegathesan are of the view that the issue needs to be studied.

Proper assessment of the success and pitfalls of the Commonwealth Games venture must be done.

Dr Nathan felt a committee should be formed to prepare a paper on it.

"Questions need to be asked. What is involved? What it entails to make a bid? And the financial risk involved like in any other bid?"

He said finance, infrastructure, human resource and the prowess of athletes should be addressed.

The scale of the Olympics, says Dr Jegathesan, is three times the Commonwealth Games.

"We must be appreciative of the size of the Olympics."

All three - number of sports, participants and countries - are triple or quadruple at times.

Some also believe that come 2008, most of the existing facilities may be outdated or need serious refurbishment. Some sports may even need new venues, for example boxing.

Where are we going to house the 15,000 competitors? The apartments used as the Games Village for the Commonwealth Games have been sold to the public and new units may have to be built.

Everyone knows bidding itself has become an industry of its own, generating jobs, expenses, largesse and goodies.

"And most of them are not bothered about the outcome," argues Dr Jegathesan.

"If you insist in putting a bid, then it must be done with extra care as huge funds would be involved."

It is a multi-million ringgit exercise. Some say gamble. But if you subscribe to Mazlan's argument, then it may be a worthwhile investment.

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