

04/10/1998

Muhyiddin gets it right first time

Randhir Singh

FOR a man who was a reluctant Sports Minister and even held the view that the post of was redundant, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has come a long way.

Listening to Muhyiddin, you are convinced that the Commonwealth Games has transformed his perception and knowledge on sports.

"It has been a new experience. Before this I knew nothing about lawn bowls, why weightlifting had clean and jerk, and how athletics can be an entertaining affair the whole day," said Muhyiddin, the country's 11th Sports Minister.

Muhyiddin discovered how sports blurred the boundaries of race and creed to bring the nation together.

"People from all walks of life irrespective of status cheered on Malaysians. Even when Malaysians featured in races where there were world class names, the fans roared the loudest when a Malaysian name was announced.

"And where have you heard of a victory lap in gymnastics? It all happened here."

The crowd that turned up at the venues astounded him. He was amazed how close to 60,000 fans turned up for the 100m clash between Ato Boldon and Frankie Fredericks.

"It was one of the biggest crowds in the world. Indeed, athletics attracted fairly good turnouts throughout the five days. And people sat through the entire proceedings."

Muhyiddin said everywhere he went he could see Malaysians expressing their support and felt proud that what was on display was truly a "Malaysian show".

"The number of faxes and calls I received from friends residing in various parts of the world sending their congratulations on what they saw on TV... some of them Malaysians expressing how proud they were to see the opening ceremony.

"I think it is ample proof that Malaysia delivered the Games."

Muhyiddin had a key role in the delivery of the Games.

Granted, Sukom were the organisers but few can deny that it was the Government who made it work.

It would not be an exaggeration to say three months before the Games, the Government literally "took over the Games from Sukom".

Between Muhyiddin and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad they brought Malaysians to their feet.

They got them excited, drummed up sufficient support and powered a highly charged publicity drive days before the start of the Games.

Muhyiddin's nationwide road-show created interest and generated overwhelming response from State Governments, Government agencies, Members of Parliament and private corporations towards the sale of tickets.

Few can forget how Sports Ministry Parliamentary secretary Datuk Sharizat Abdul Jalil's Bangsar Show got the adrenalin of the city folk flowing.

Not only was it a success in terms of attendance but also the RM2 million raised to buy tickets for schools, the less fortunate and old folks' homes.

But it was the "education" received by Muhyiddin that augurs well for the sport.

Appointed as Minister in 1995, Muhyiddin's enthusiasm shows and he seems

eager to go further.

He talks of schools, long term development and the 2008 Olympics.

"It is imperative that we go down to schools. It is vital we have a long-term development programme. But this must only be for selected sports. We have to study the sports that can deliver medals.

"It is not discrimination but a reality of life. In some sports we simply cannot be the leaders."

Muhyiddin said it was important that Malaysia ride on the success of the Games and use it to usher in a new chapter in sport.

"We must not allow it to go to waste. In all spheres of sports - be it coaching, training, marketing, organisation - the Games has broken new ground.

"The Government will use it as a launching pad to push sports to a higher plateau."

On a parting note, although Muhyiddin could not speak at length about the RM800 million 10-year training programme for the 2008 Olympics, but promised:

"We will announce the details soon."

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