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No free ride for pre-Games

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WHILE fans will witness the pre-Games at the Bukit Jalil Stadium on July 11-19 free of charge, it will be no free ride for the five sports associations who will be involved in the test run for the Commonwealth Games.

Sukom '98, the Commonwealth Games organisers, are expecting the associations to foot part of the bill.

The five associations - athletics, swimming, squash, gymnastics and men's hockey - have until March 15 to submit their budgets for the pre-Games meets.

"We don't know how much the pre-Games are going to cost Sukom," said Sukom executive chairman Jen (rtd) Tan Sri Hashim Ali yesterday.

"Only after we receive the proposals from the associations will we have a clear idea. The budget for the pre-Games will come out of the RM310 million Sukom have allotted for the Games.

"So we hope the associations will be agreeable to meet some of the expenses." Once Sukom receive the estimated budget, which Hashim expects to be inflated, the trimming-down process will begin. A meeting with the associations will be held soon to finalise the budget.

"They must not exceed the deadline because we don't have much time to plan for the pre-Games test," said Hashim.

The pre-Games, at the suggestion of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to test the scoreboards, scoring systems and crowd control, is seen as a crucial test to gauge Sukom's preparations as well.

Astro and Tanjong PLC, appointed to assemble an extensive semi-television system which will broadcast live footage of all 16 Commonwealth sports to their client broadcasters, will also use the pre-Games as a trial.

The system, worth RM7.5 million, will enable sports commentators, producers and others to use live feeds of events via satellite.

The Light Rail Transit system is expected to be completed by July and this will enable Sukom to check their transport department's preparations as well.

The run will benefit the five sports as well because they will get a chance to further prepare their athletes. Hockey and squash are expected to invite an international field while athletics, swimming and gymnastics will be low-key affairs.

Malaysia AAU (MAAU) president Datuk Khalid Yunus said earlier they will not invite any big names for the trials and instead concentrate on testing the system.

Khalid said MAAU will need about RM300,000 to organise the meet and they are prepared to shoulder a portion of it. On accommodation, MAAU will house the athletes at the Petronas Training Centre and the Maybank Sports Complex, in Bangi.

Sukom are also considering giving out prizes to fans and organise a concert to gauge crowd control and parking facilities.

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