

09 SEP 1998

Games-Rehearsal

PM WITNESSES FINAL REHEARSAL OF GAMES' OPENING

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 9 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight witnessed the final full dress rehearsal for the opening ceremony of the 16th Commonwealth Games.

He was accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali. Also present were Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik and Sukom '98 Bhd chairman Gen (Rtd) Tan Sri Hashim Ali.

Unlike the previous rain-soaked rehearsal on Sunday, tonight's ceremony went on smoothly as rain clouds steered clear of the National Stadium at Bukit Jalil here, the centre-stage of the Games, which is hosted for the first time ever by an Asian country.

The crowd turnout tonight was better than on Sunday as the stadium was almost full to its 100,000 capacity.

Among the highlights of the four-hour extravaganza were a colourful welcoming presentation by dancers who swayed and sashayed to traditional Malay numbers and the marching-in of the 70 participating Commonwealth members.

The crowd broke into a thunderous applause when the Malaysian contingent made its appearance as spectators spontaneously filled the stadium with cries of "Malaysia Boleh".

Also making their presence felt in the arena were the 5,000 people who made up the so-called "human graphics" who used coloured cards to depict the various facets of the Games including the flags of participating countries.

The Games, also known as Kuala Lumpur '98, will be opened on Friday by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar.

Some 5,000 athletes and officials are taking part in the Games, billed as the grandest ever staged. Commonwealth head Queen Elizabeth II will grace the closing ceremony of the Games on Sept 21.

-- BERNAMA

MAM RAZ SHY