

13/07/1998

Showpiece will be under scrutiny

S. Navalan

THE showpiece National Stadium in Bukit Jalil was officially opened by the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Saturday in a glittering four-hour ceremony.

But the real test for the stadium, acknowledged as one of the most technologically advanced in the world, will only come when the athletic championships begin today.

It is important that the Stadium and its facilities live up to the expectations of Malaysians and the world. As the stadium will be the centrepiece for the Games, a glitch-free meet would ensure the Games would be a success.

On the athletics front, the Open will witness the renewed rivalry between sprinters Azmi Ibrahim and national record holder Watson Nyambek.

Azmi recently completed a two-year suspension by the International Amateur Athletic Association (IAAF) for a banned substance.

His return has irked some quarters as they accused authorities of giving him top class treatment despite failing a dope test.

The Pahang lad is on a mission as he must dip below 10.41s to qualify for the Commonwealth Games squad.

So far, only 15 athletes have made the mark in their respective events.

The question now is whether Azmi can make it. His last race saw him returning a handtimed 10.5 at the Johor Open two weeks ago. This is far from his best of 10.39.

Watson himself is eager to pit himself against Azmi. He aims to be the first Malaysian to go below 10.3s.

While much of the limelight will be on Azmi and Watson, other runners like quarter-miler Romzi Bakar and sprinter Roslan Saat will be out to make the Games squad.

Of the foreign entries received by the Malaysian AAU (MAAU), many participating countries have mostly entered their field athletes.

This would be a chance for jumpers Zaki Sadri and Tai Song Lip to take advantage of the stiff competition to better their marks.

The foreign entries this year are from Russia, Australia, Taiwan, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, Mauritius, Vietnam, Singapore and Brunei.

A total of 486 competitors will compete this year.

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