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Bid was mightier than any bribe

Randhir Singh

EXPENSIVE pens costing RM3,000 to RM8,000 each were given to Commonwealth Games Federation delegates prior to the voting in Barcelona in July, 1992.

The souvenirs - 25 Mont Blanc and 17 Sheaffer pens - were among the items given out by Kuala Lumpur City Hall.

Documents made available to Timesport yesterday revealed that the City Hall delegation headed by former mayor Tan Sri Elyas Omar handed out the souvenirs, which included ties, silk shirts, pareo.

However, there is no mention of gold watches in the report which was submitted to the Sports Ministry. The report stated City Hall spent RM1.7 million on the souvenirs.

The report also wanted the bid committee comprising the Olympic Council of Malaysia, Sports Ministry and City Hall to pay the latter half the amount spent.

In total, Malaysia's expenditure was RM3 million with the bulk of it spent on travelling from one continent to another to promote the bid.

OCM secretary Sieh Kok Chi has denied OCM and the bid committee gave out lavish gifts.

"Not us. OCM did not give out any expensive item. Maybe ties, which to us are just souvenirs," said Sieh.

CGF rules allow bidding parties to hand out gifts not worth more than STG50 (RM315) per item.

Sieh said Malaysia's bid for the 1998 Games was above board and there was 'no element of manipulation'.

Adelaide Lord Mayor Steve Condous claimed in Melbourne two days ago that Kuala Lumpur gave expensive gifts to CGF assembly delegates to influence the vote which went 40-25 in KL's favour.

Sieh said Kuala Lumpur won the bid simply because 'the bid was strong and sound'.

He said Malaysia offered 2,000 air tickets to the participants but it was done through the Commonwealth Games Federation.

"Indeed, it was stated in our bid document. CGF even allowed Adelaide to do the same but they wanted to give it to selected cities, which did not go down well with CGF members."

Sieh said everything OCM did was upon consultation with CGF.

"Even when we invited all the delegates to the opening of the OCM building in 1991, it was done with CGF's permission. CGF also allowed Adelaide to have a similar programme."

Sieh said OCM took great pains to ensure the bid was clean, even rejecting an agent claiming to be in the business of providing women and accommodation for delegates.

"He proposed a RM450,000 budget and claimed he had the blessing of the Sports Ministry. We checked with the Ministry and there was no such deal."

Sieh said Malaysia won the bid because of several factors such as unity among developing economies, Malaysia's booming economy then, which gave the delegates confidence that it could deliver the Games.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's popularity among developing countries and the general feeling among delegates for a change in host nation, too, had a bearing.

"All along, it was either New Zealand, Australia, Canada or Britain who hosted the Games. The majority felt the time was right for the Games to move to another continent."

"Our overall package was also attractive. We offered team sports such as cricket, rugby and hockey for the first time. That drew support from the Caribbean and the Pacific islands. Even the Africans were thrilled."

Sieh said OCM were ready to be investigated and have all documents to prove nothing untoward took place.

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