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Grand finale to Penang Games

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday acknowledged sport as a driving force in promoting unity and harmony towards the formation of a Bangsa Malaysia.

By excelling in sport, he said, Malaysians could also hone their competitive and fighting spirit in any arena globally.

"Excellence in sport can spur the development of a Bangsa Malaysia - a race which is loyal to its country," he said at the closing the 8th Malaysia Games at the Batu Kawan State Stadium.

The over 50,000 spectators who filled the stadium had earlier welcomed Dr Mahathir and Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali with the 'Penang Wave' and there was all round applause.

Soon after the 19 contingents, accompanied by two bands of the Royal Malay Regiment, made the traditional marchpast with, of course, the Penang contingent, getting the loudest cheers.

Then Dr Mahathir presented the best athlete awards to swimmers Allen Ong of Perak and Sia Wai Yen of Kuala Lumpur and the Prime Minister's Trophy to overall champions Selangor.

Also present were Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam and other dignitaries.

"Although sport ensures that we become healthy, strong and live longer, sport in Malaysia also gives us a lot of practise in becoming competitive," the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir said the need to maintain the competitive and fighting spirit in sports was needed if Malaysia wished to host the Olympic Games.

"We cannot host the Olympic Games by merely boasting of having huge stadiums... we must also have athletes of international standard who are constantly training to achieve world-class status."

The 10-day Games which began on May 25 saw over 6,000 athletes vie for 309 gold medals. Over 60 Games record were set and Dr Mahathir said that this was proof that Malaysian sportsmen were continuously setting high standards.

We have proven today that whatever we try our hand in, that we can and Malaysia Boleh," said Dr Mahathir.

Four canon shots and a 10-minute fireworks display followed Dr Mahathir's closing ceremony speech.

The Games flag was brought down by 2nd Lt Abdul Rani Abdul Majid from the 2nd Battalion, Royal Malay Regiment and he handed it over to Dr Koh.

Dr Koh handed the flag to Dr Mahathir who handed it to Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Osu Sukam. Sabah are the hosts of the 2002 Games.

Dr Koh, in his speech, thanked all parties concerned, especially the people of Penang, for their efforts in making the Games a success.

Dr Koh also said they will help Sabah in whatever way they can.

The closing ceremony ended with a lucky draw with four grand prizes - a house in Bandar Baru Air Itam, a Perodua Kancil car, a Honda motorcycle and household furniture.

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