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REGIONAL BLOCK VOTING MAY COST INDIA IN THE FIRST ROUND

By: David Chelliah

PUSAN, South Korea, Nov 10 (Bernama) -- New Delhi could be the first casualty if delegates at the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) chose the 2006 Asian Games city based on regional block voting, according to Tunku Imran Tuanku Jaafar here today.

He said that Kuala Lumpur, Doha and Hong Kong would survive the first round if delegates decided to vote on regional sentiment.

Tunku Imran, the president of the Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM) and deputy chairman of the Kuala Lumpur 2006 Asian Games Bid Committee, said Doha would get the support from 12 nations from the West Asian region.

He said Kuala Lumpur would receive 10 votes from Southeast Asia, Hong Kong nine from East Asia and New Delhi with seven from southern Asia while Central Asian votes of four could be shared equally.

The OCA will conduct a secret ballot on Sunday to decide the winning city and the election process will be conducted on elimination rounds.

The city which secures 51 per cent of the total of 42 votes will be declared the winner while anything fewer than that will have to go through elimination rounds.

Tunku Imran said if regional block voting took place then Kuala Lumpur would encounter a close fight with the two main bidders -- Doha and Hong Kong.

Speaking to reporters after hosting a lunch for OCA delegates at the Lotte Hotel here today, he said Youth and Sports Minister, Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein, Kuala Lumpur Mayor, Tan Sri Kamaruzzaman Sharif and he himself would be speakers for the presentation on Sunday.

Each bidding city will be allowed to make a presentation before the OCA delegates on Sunday before the voting takes place.

Tunku Imran said Kuala Lumpur would use audio visual presentation and among others would highlight Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's message to the delegates.

"We have tremendous support but it's not in the open...We must be vigilant in the next two days before voting," he said.

Meanwhile, Hishammudin, the bid committee chairman, said the race to win the bid would not be easy following stiff campaigning by the three bidders.

"On paper, we have the confidence....but there are 42 delegates who will decide our fate here," he said.

Hishammuddin said Kuala Lumpur needed the Games "as it will focus on a six-year development plan and also unite the Malaysian people and that of the Asian region."

He stressed that the voting process should be transparent and fair.

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