

PM: Start young to achieve excellence

BUKIT JALIL: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday expressed his satisfaction with Malaysia's performance in the 21st KL SEA Games.

The host nation emerged overall champions for the first time in the biennial Games with an unprecedented haul of 111 golds, 75 silvers and 85 bronze medals to topple defending champions Thailand, who finished second with a 103-86-89 tally.

He said that in previous SEA Games, Malaysia's best performance did not even surpass 80 gold medals.

"I'm surprised that our athletes were able to win 111 (golds) this time," he told reporters at a press conference at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil after officiating at the closing ceremony of the Games last night.

Dr Mahathir said that those who hoped to represent the country in the future should start training at a young age as this would give them a better chance to succeed.

The Prime Minister, however, expressed his disappointment at the country's track and field athletes, who managed to win only eight gold medals despite having boldly predicted a 16-gold haul.

"But they should not be disheartened and strive to do better the next time," he said, adding he was confident that Malaysians would succeed in sports if they started training from young.

Dr Mahathir also hoped Malaysian athletes would maintain their standard in the next Games scheduled to be held in Vietnam in 2003.

"We should not be champions only at home. We should be able to hold our own wherever we compete," he said.