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Games contingent earn PM's admiration

Cheah Chor Sooi

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last night expressed heartfelt congratulation to the Malaysian Sea Games contingent who defied odds to emerge overall champions in the biennial meet.

"At first, I was pessimistic with our potential in sports ... I was not confident when I spoke to our athletes prior to the competition at Putrajaya.

"I only expected our athletes to bring home some medals as a symbolic gesture of our participation.

"But as time went on, our performance improved and so did our medal tally. I then braved myself to watch events staged around Kuala Lumpur such as athletics, equestrian, bowling and lawn bowling.

"I thought my presence would have brought bad omen to our teams, but alas, this time, we won," he said at a dinner to commemorate the achievement of the Malaysian contingent at the 21st Sea Games in September.

Also present were Sports Minister Datuk Hishamuddin Tun Hussein and Olympic Council of Malaysia president Tunku Imran Tuanku Ja'afar.

A total `payout' of RM775,500 - the biggest since the 1998 Commonwealth Games - was made to 185 athletes as well as their coaches and associations under the National Sports Council cash incentive scheme.

In a jest, Dr Mahathir also expressed his fascination with the Japanese who despite their small built, were able to participate in "big size" sport such as sumo.

"This highlights the possibility of breeding tall Malaysians to compete with the African and European athletes.

"However, the secret of winning gold medals is practice and practice, and to keep oneself in perfect form," added Dr Mahathir.

Malaysia emerged the overall champion in the nine-day meet with 111 gold, 75 silver and 85 bronze medals - the biggest win for the country since the introduction of the Sea Games in 1959.

cscheah@nstp.com.my

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