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Hundreds tested for drug abuse

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SPRINT merchants Watson Nyambek, Hamberi Mahat and Azmi Ibrahim are among hundreds of athletes who have been tested for substance abuse as the Olympic Council of Malaysia step up their war against drug cheats.

And with the Sea Games just days away, the random tests are set to increase as OCM do not want any athlete to bring embarrassment and disgrace to the country.

In fact, OCM president Tan Sri Tunku Imran Tuanku Ja'afar labelled it as cheating and does not want cheats to represent the country.

"We are currently in the second round of testing and this is part of the out-of-competition testing that we do at random," said Tunku Imran when met after the flag handing ceremony of the Jalur Gemilang to the Sea Games contingent by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Putrajaya yesterday.

"And the tests will be an ongoing process and the athletes will be selected on a random basis."

The national athletes, numbering 558, have been subjected to frequent tests by OCM and even the National Sports Council conducted tests on all the Gemilang 2001 trainees since the start of the centralised training programme for the Games.

Besides, Watson, Hamberi and Azmi, hurdler Moh Siew Wei was also tested for banned substance.

"It is the normal procedure to test athletes for substance abuse. We have conducted tests on Hidayat Hamidon (weightlifting) and even the sepaktakraw players were subjected to it," said NSC director of international preparations Ahmad Shapawi Ismail yesterday.

And according to Malaysian Association for Doping Control in Sports chairman Datuk Dr Mani Jegathesan, these tests are conducted on a regular basis and throughout the year to detect drug cheats.

"It is part of our ongoing efforts, which is also in line with the steps proposed by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), to detect athletes who use drugs to enhance their performance," said Jegathesan when contacted in Brisbane yesterday.

Jegathesan, who is also an OCM vice president and heads the OCM Medical Commission, is in Brisbane for the Goodwill Games.

"Although, we are not at liberty to reveal why and whom we test, suffice to say that the athletes are selected randomly."

"These tests are conducted during off-season periods, out of competition periods, during competitions and so on and so forth. In short, we conduct these tests regularly."

However, according to Jegathesan, to date, no Malaysian athlete has been tested positive for any drug abuse but that does not mean that the association nor OCM will stop the tests.