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Make us proud, Malaysia

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THE time to fulfill promises, deliver pledges and above all, rise above expectations, is upon us as the Kuala Lumpur Sea Games begin today.

Three gold medals will be decided before tonight's opening ceremony and by then, Malaysia are expected to have already won their first through equestrian's Datuk Awang Kamaruddin Abdul Ghani in the gruelling endurance event.

His is expected to be the first of a record haul of gold medals. The target of the National Sports Council, who have spared no expense in preparing the athletes, is 80.

A rather conservative target, seeing as this is the best preparation Malaysia have ever had and probably the most indepth among the 10 competing countries.

The NSC could have aimed for more. In fact, the associations have a combined target of 112 gold medals but the NSC felt it was better to be realistic than idealistic.

Ideally we would like more than 100 gold medals and win the overall title. But the reality check says we are good for 80 or less, and finish second.

But having said that, this is the stage for the 32 associations to prove that even reality can sometimes be an illusion.

While the lack of overall strength suggests that Malaysia cannot win the overall title, sports is about rising above yourself, attaining excellence and delivering.

For the associations, especially those who have failed to deliver despite the millions that have been pumped in, this could well be their most important Sea Games ever.

There is going to be a distinctive shift for Malaysian sports after KL 2001 and the Asian and world stages are where Malaysia's attention is going to be focussed on.

So if there was ever a time when the non-performers had to come good, it is over the next 10 days.

While this doesn't guarantee anything, it will at least give these sports a more favourable chance when the National Sports Council separate the sheep from the goat after the Games.

But that is in the near future.

What matters now, as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said on Tuesday, is winning and for that to happen, the national athletes have to believe in themselves.

Gold medals are sure to be lost but just as importantly, they are there to be won too and it is the borderline cases which are going to determine whether Malaysia will enjoy a Games that is even more successful than what is expected.

While it is imperative for aquatics, bowling, squash, lawn bowls, gymnastics the combat sports and even athletics to deliver, it is how Malaysia fare in sports where the base isn't strong that will determine the total won.

Boxing, rowing, table tennis are just some of the sports where the advantage is, sadly, with the opposition and if Malaysians can churn out gold medal winning performances here, then the dream of being overall champions can indeed be a reality.

The best can't be asking for too much and who knows, Malaysia's gold

medal tally could well hit the century mark for the first time ever.
And frankly, they have more than 100 reasons to go for it.