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Our Sea Games was a job well done

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THE closing ceremony of the Kuala Lumpur 2001 Sea Games was a special occasion. An estimated 80,000 Malaysians from all walks of life gathered to bid farewell to athletes from the participating nations and to celebrate a newly acquired status - the Overall Champions of the KL Sea Games.

The loudest cheers were of course reserved for our athletes. They made us so proud over the last two weeks. It wasn't so much that they had created history by winning the overall championship for the first time, but it was the manner in which they clinched the title.

On their historic march to the overall title, our athletes won a record number of 111 gold medals, brushing aside their rivals in imperious fashion.

Our Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, set the tone right from the beginning. He articulated his support for our athletes by donning the Malaysian contingent's colours during the handing over of the Jalur Gemilang at Putra Jaya. The occasion was symbolic and significant as he willed our athletes to carry the flag into battle for the country's honour.

Two weeks ago, our challenge for sports supremacy of the Sea region seemed impossible to many. After all, conventional wisdom dictated that Thailand who have been overall champions on nine previous occasions, were the favourites. But by the third day of competition, Malaysia the dark horse, showed their potential by galloping ahead of the others with 30 gold medals and never looked back thereafter.

The initial success fuelled the rush for more and enabled our athletes to perform above and beyond expectations. Without a doubt, winning the overall title is the highlight of the Sea Games - a truly stellar achievement.

The days before the commencement were characterised by teething problems related to accreditation, venue, transportation and accommodation.

When the Games got going problems with results surfaced but they were sorted out and whatever other minor problems left were soon drowned by the euphoric cries of Malaysia Boleh! as our gold medal factory churned out the medals.

There was much to cheer about. 90,000 fans supporting our football team is something that has not happened for a long time.

Highlighting the contributions of ex-national women athletes Sylvia Ng, Lisa Kwan, Nurul Huda, Marina Chin and G. Shanti was positive acknowledgement of the role of women in Malaysian sport. In return, women athletes in our contingent justified the gesture by contributing 47 golds or 42 per cent of the 111 won by our contingent.

Starting a fund to purchase tickets for the disabled, senior citizens and schoolchildren was a noble act typical of the caring attitude of Malaysians. It made it possible for Malaysians from all stations in life to experience the magic moments of the Games. The Corporal Azmar Abu Fund is another case in point.

Rosman Alwi encapsulated the spirit of Malaysia Boleh!. He has graced the Sea Games since 1979. Going on 40 he was still able to compete against the best in the region. Breaking the 200m sprint record in the qualifying rounds is testimony to his determined pursuit of excellence. A Games record and a silver in the Olympic sprint team event is a fitting final

curtain for Rosman.

The Torch Run is something else. The Torch at any multi-sport event is traditionally relayed to a host city by athletes. Nothing wrong to involve the rakyat but It would have been meaningful to include more young talent and school athletes located along the 11,527km route.

How many of the reported 1,337,698 participants were school or potential state athletes I wonder. Sad to say, some of the Torch bearers highlighted in the media seem to have no connection whatsoever with sports.

The 21st Sea Games will best be remembered as memorable in terms of our contingent's performance. Athlete preparation was well planned and executed. However, there were shortcomings and the NSC post mortem will reveal and determine the future of some sports.

We have to get faster, higher and stronger for Manchester and Pusan.

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