

15 SEP 2001
SEA-Athletics (Reanchai)
REANCHAI BEATS AZMI IN PHOTO-FINISH

By: D. Arul Rajoo

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 15 (Bernama) -- Sprint king Reanchai Seeharwong of Thailand retained his sprint double after a nail-biting 200m final in which he pipped home favourite Azmi Ibrahim to the gold in a photo-finish here today.

Confusion reigned at the National Stadium after both sprinters seemed to have breasted the tape at the same time. The 200m was earlier delayed by two false starts which forced Singapore's Mohd Shameer Mohd Ayub out of the race.

While Reanchai stood on the tracks watching the scoreboard to get a definite result, the event announcer declared that his Malaysian rival has won the race, causing confusion among officials, journalists and spectators.

Minutes later, it was declared that Reanchai, who won the 100m crown on Wednesday, has won the 200m gold with a time of 20.95s, which is slower than his own SEA Games record of 20.69s set in Brunei two years ago.

Azmi, who became only the second Malaysian ever to dip below 21s when he clocked 20.97s in winning his heat yesterday, settled for silver with a time of 20.97s.

Azmi's teammate R. Ganeshwaran took the bronze with a time of 21.35s in the race which was watched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Azmi not only missed out on the gold but also failed to erase one of the oldest national records. Datuk Dr M. Jegathesan holds the 200m national record of 20.92s which he set at the Mexico Olympics in 1968.

Despite the confusion, Reanchai said he was confident that he had won the gold medal.

"I am happy that I won but I should have done better. I am not happy with my start. I should have taken the lead from the start," said the Asian Games bronze medallist.

Reanchai said his participation in several meets prior to the Games had affected his performance here as he should have concentrated on his training.

Azmi, who served a two-year suspension after being tested positive for a banned substance in 1996, said he was happy with his run.

"I was not thinking about the gold. It was not a bad race. I am happy anyway as it has been a long time since I last won a medal," he said.

Azmi made the SEA Games squad despite failing to beat the qualifying mark. His place in the 200m was secured by virtue of the qualification of the relay squad.

He is ranked only seventh in the region this year based on his season's best of 21.69s.

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