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SEA-Opening (Speech)

SEA GAMES CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN FRIENDLY TRADITION

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 8 (Bernama) -- Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said the 21st SEA Games starting here today will continue with the tradition and strengthen ties between countries in this region.

He said that for 42 years the Asean member countries had met, competed and gone through hardship together, and shared a bond of friendship for which there was no comparison.

"Today we meet again to renew our pledge and spirit at this extraordinary gathering," said Hishammuddin who is also Chairman of the Organising Committee of the 21st SEA Games at its opening at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil, here.

The official opening was performed by Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah.

Also present were Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his counterpart from Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra.

He said although every athlete aimed to win, what was more important was solidarity through sport which acted as a bridge in human relations.

He also said that the organisers and athletes had put in much efforts into the event and in the next two weeks, the results of all this preparation would be seen.

"Therefore, it's on this note that I take great pleasure on behalf of the Government and people of Malaysia, in welcoming all of you to the 21st SEA Games," he said.

Hishammuddin also took the opportunity to thank the hundreds of people who had given their unstinting efforts and time to ensure the success of the first Games in the new millennium.

"Everyone, including personnel, volunteers, school children, the one million torch runners who helped spread the games' fever, Rakan Muda youths, professionals, dedicated committees, sponsors and media, I say to you a heartfelt Thank You," he said.

SEA Games Federation president (SEAGF) Tunku Imran Tuanku Ja'afar meanwhile said that the standard of some of the sports in the SEA Games had significantly dropped despite the biennial games being 42 years old.

In his remarks at the opening ceremony, Tunku Imran said the biennial meet was one of the oldest running regional games in the world.

"In fact, in Asia we were the first region to organise such an event - a testimony to the wisdom of those involved in sports at that time.

"However, I am not convinced that the standard of sports in this region is any higher compared to the rest of the world, than it was in 1959," he said.

Tunku Imran, who is also the Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM) president, said that SEAGF was aware of the decline and its council had agreed that the games should be a platform for athletes from the region to improve their performance at Asian Games and Olympic Games levels.

"And (it) should not be regarded as the culmination of an athlete's sporting achievement," he added.

-- BERNAMA

AR AO