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SEA-Mahathir

USE SEA GAMES TO MAKE ASEAN STAND TALL, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 7 (Bernama) -- The 21st Kuala Lumpur SEA Games should see a new awakening in Southeast Asia on international sports, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"If it can prove to be an important watershed, we in Malaysia will be the first to endeavour to make cogent contribution towards galvanising Southeast Asian sportsmen and sportswomen," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this was aimed at improving standards in terms of management, coaching and performance so that in due course Asean would stand tall in the world of international sport.

He said this in his message entitled "...of Athletes and Regional Cooperation" in the official souvenir programme of the 21st SEA Games.

The Prime Minister said there was no reason why the sporting community in this region could not come together to assist one another in pursuing excellence.

The 10-day Games involving 10 countries will be opened by Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil tomorrow.

"Regional cooperation should not be confined only to politics and economics. It is equally relevant in the field of sports," he said.

"Sport may not always be triumphant over politics and economics, but neither has it been permanently incapacitated by upheavals and recessions," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was for all Southeast Asian participants to endeavour to contribute uncompromisingly to the success of the Games.

Southeast Asia's ability to work together should no longer be in doubt, he said.

But sport, which has proven the most resilient, has one more major target to pursue -- to work towards elevating the standard of its athletes so that in the not too distant future Southeast Asian athletes would earn the respect of the world, he said.

International sport, including the Olympics, has always had wider implications than just to provide the occasion for athletes to demonstrate who among them belong to the superior breed, he said.

The gathering of people from several countries cannot but engender a spirit of camaraderie, in many cases leading to firm friendship among competitors and spectators, he said.

"Harmonious diplomatic ties among nations cannot be sustained purely by close rapport among the leaders. Without roots, the growth of trees cannot be sustained," he said.

Indeed it was with the aim of fostering closer friendship among the peoples of Southeast Asia that the Southeast Asia Peninsular (SEAP) Games was inaugurated in 1959 in Bangkok.

"Malaysia is hosting the Games at a crucial stage in the history of the region. Yet the consensus of opinion among those charged with the organisation of the Games is that it should be one of the best, if not the best ever," Dr Mahathir.

Malaysia's very successful hosting of the Commonwealth Games in 1998, the first Asian country given the honour, is sufficient assurance that it has the experience and capacity to achieve the high standards it has set for itself, he said.

-- BERNAMA

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