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## Set up Permanent Secretariat

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last night suggested that a Malaysia Games Permanent Secretariat be set up to improve the running of the Games.

Dr Mahathir, in a speech read by Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, said the Games, which are held every two years, has become an important event to identify potential athletes in various sports.

"These Games have been held nine times and there must be many aspects that can be improved to ensure the aim of holding the event is fulfilled.

"Through a Games Permanent Secretariat, suggestions can be compiled and evaluation can be done so that future Games will be more successful. This way, we can hope to organise a more efficient and cost effective Malaysia Games in future," he said.

Hishammuddin was reading the Prime Minister's speech at the closing ceremony of the Ninth Malaysia Games at the Likas Sports Complex in Kota Kinablu, Sabah yesterday.

Present were Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, State Legislative Assembly Speaker Datuk Hassan Alban Sandukong, Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers from other States.

The Prime Minister said the Games is not only an avenue to seek potential athletes, but also to strengthen national integration through sports.

"Although the distance between Sabah and West Malaysia is big, the Government has through these Games allowed Malaysians from different places to meet in one place. This will in turn increase understanding among the people.

"The strength of our nation depends on political stability and harmony among the various races. However, some quarters envy peace and unity that we enjoy and always try to divide us," he said.

Dr Mahathir also congratulated athletes and officials who participated in the Games.

Meanwhile, Chong in his speech, thanked the people for supporting the Games which began on Sept 2.

"We are happy and we thank the people of Sabah and visitors from Sarawak, West Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam who supported and showed their commitment to the Games," he said.

The highlight of the closing ceremony was the handing over of the Games flag from Chong to Negeri Sembilan Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad.

The 10th Malaysia Games will be held in Negri Sembilan in 2004.

The ceremony also saw Hishammuddin presenting awards to the Sportsman and Sportswoman of the Games.

The Sportsman's award went to Ng Shu Mun of Perak who won three gold and three silver medals in artistic gymnastics.

Kuala Lumpur's Ngew Sin Mei won the Sportswoman's award for record-breaking feats in the triple jump and long jump.

Selangor, with a haul of 55 gold, 40 silver and 60 bronze medals and 655 points, were the overall champions.

Some 40,000 people who thronged the stadium were entertained with a parachute show and cultural performances.

Popular singer Siti Nurhaliza also entertained the crowd.

The closing ceremony ended with a fireworks display.