

Najib: Sports a unifying force
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By MAZLINDA MAHMOOD AND HASHINI KANNAN

It has contributed to the uplifting of the spirit of Malaysians

SPORTS' contributions to the nation must not be undermined as it has proven to be an effective tool to unite and bolster the people's spirit, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

"This is because when we step into the field to play, we will look past one's skin colour.

"We will work as a team and play with team spirit to win," he said before presenting awards to the country's medal winners of the 26th Sea Games at the Juara Stadium in Bukit Kiara yesterday.

Present were Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Shabery Cheek and National Sports Council director-general Datuk Zolkples Embong.

Najib presented cash awards to 71 Sea Games medalists.

This year, Malaysia won 59 gold, 50 silver and 82 bronze medals in 13 sports events.

The country had set a target to clinch 40 gold medals in the 26th Sea Games.

Najib said when the Sea Games was held in Kuala Lumpur in 1989, the people's spirits were low as the country was recovering from recession.

But, the winnings clinched by Malaysian athletes had cheered the nation at that time, he added.

"When Malaysia hosted the Sea Games then and we came in second, the people's spirits just soared.

"Sports' achievements have a great impact on a country, which is why sports is important," said Najib, who was then the youth and sports minister.

In this respect, he gave his assurance that the government would continue to support the sports industry so that more victories involving Team Malaysia would be secured in the future.

"We should use the success of the recent Sea Games as a launch pad for more successes in the future," he said.

Najib believed better and effective efforts were needed to train the current team and junior athletes, if the country were to become a powerhouse in sports one day.

"We have to look at how we can do things in a more effective way; how our junior athletes can be exposed to a structured training system from an early age and how we can build a

conducive environment to support sports development."

Najib also urged the corporate sector to take part in the country's sports development efforts.

"Those who are already doing this can do better and give more.

"I believe sports is a great vehicle for them to build their brand," he said, citing Milo's success to push its brand to be equated with sporting prowess.

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