

THE BATTLE HOTS UP

Honour and millions of dollars are at stake in the bid to host the next Commonwealth Games. Will it be Kuala Lumpur or Adelaide?

THE BATTLE between Kuala Lumpur and Adelaide for the privilege of hosting the 1998 Commonwealth Games is beginning to reach white hot levels. The reason: D-Day is near. On July 21, secret ballots cast by 66 members of the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) in Barcelona, Spain will determine the outcome.

So far Kuala Lumpur has remained cool. In February this year, Tan Sri Hamzah Abu Samah, president of the Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM), said, 'As far as we are concerned, we'll play by the rules. We want to be hosts of the Games but we won't resort to desperate measures.'

The Australians haven't been that laid back. Earlier this year, the Adelaide bidding committee president, Steve Condous, was quoted as saying that Malaysia wanted to host the Games merely to boost its tourism industry. Malaysian sports officials also point out that in 1991, just before the CGF annual general meeting in Malta, an Australian television station broadcast an unfavourable report on Malaysia.

Then there is one Prof John Sutton of Sydney University who reportedly deemed that the heat and humidity in KL would make it a highly unsuitable venue for the Games – a claim that local medical experts have unanimously dismissed as groundless.

But there wasn't always a scramble for the honour of playing host. There was a time when cities, especially those in developing countries, were reluctant to host international meets because it meant heavy financial commitments. As such, the Commonwealth Games has been hosted by developed countries since its inception more than 60 years ago, with the exception of the Games in 1966 which was held in Kingston, Jamaica while it was still a British colony.

The Games largely rotated among the Big Four, namely Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, with some cities like Edinburgh and Auckland playing host twice. Still, the CGF has always ended its annual congress by calling on developing countries to host the Games, now KL has answered the call.

What drives the bids? Simply the millions of dollars available from promotions and sponsorship. Other reasons include the potential upgrading of infrastructure and the business spillover effects from preparing for a world-class event.

The organising committee of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics proved to the world that major sports events can be run profitably. The 1988 Seoul Olympics was an even bigger success, recording a profit of US\$88 million. Thus for recession-plagued Adelaide, whose organisers

have set aside A\$4 million (7.6 million rgt) for the campaign, the Commonwealth Games might prove to be the proverbial shot in the arm.

Speaking to the New Straits Times earlier in the year, OCM's Hamzah said the cost of organising the Games in KL is estimated at 77 million rgt, slightly below the projected revenue of 78 million rgt. So there is no need for financial aid from the government (see tables).

KL'S BID FOR THE 1998 COMMONWEALTH GAMES

Projecting operating costs (mil rgt)	
Executive services	15.10
Sports	4.75
Finance and administration	10.35
Marketing	11.70
Operations	28.10
Ceremonies, community programmes	7.00
Total	<u>77.00</u>
Projected sources of income (mil rgt)	
Coins and stamps	0.50
Lotteries	15.00
Sponsors & suppliers	40.00
Television fees	13.00
Licensing and merchandising	3.00
Ticket sales	3.00
Donations	3.00
Queen's baton relay	0.50
Total	<u>78.00</u>

Others are more optimistic. They say that £20 million (approximately 90 million rgt) could come from international sponsorship and after deducting miscellaneous expenses, a profit of 70 to 80 million rgt is 'not impossible.'

Adelaide, meanwhile, has quoted an operating outlay of A\$65 million which includes assistance of A\$25 million from its government, and an equivalent estimate in earnings.

Infrastructure-wise, Malaysia more than meets the requirements. The 1 billion rgt National Sports Centre at Bukit Jalil which will include a main stadium with a seating capacity of 100,000 people, an Olympic-size swimming pool, an indoor stadium and games village will be built irrespective of whether Malaysia will get to host the 1998 Games, says Datuk Alex Lee, vice-president of OCM.

United Engineers (Malaysia) has been awarded the contract to build the main stadium, the swimming pool and the indoor stadium, Lee adds. City Hall will be shouldering the task of constructing the games villages as a housing development project.

Meanwhile, the CGF inspection team comprising Michael Fennell, Brian Wightman and Ivor Dent has given KL the 'thumbs up'. Apart from having to build a facility for lawn bowling at Bukit Kiara, everything else seems to be in place.

'One very good thing about KL hosting the Games is that present facilities will have to be upgraded to meet the stringent requirements of the event,' says Lee who is also deputy minister at the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development. Lee estimates Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) will spend at least 150 million rgt to upgrade its present facilities to international standards. Another benefit is the Games will put Malaysia decidedly on the world map.

On KL's chances, Lee says, 'There's a good sentiment behind us. I think we should win.' While Adelaide has been slick and aggressive in its bidding campaign, KL kicked off its campaign on a 'give us a chance' basis.

To secure the host job, KL needs at least 34 votes. Lee tells **Malaysian Business** that he is confident of at least 20 votes. Out of the 10 CGF members in Europe, Lee anticipates at least five to vote in KL's favour. He hopes for at least another seven votes from the nine in Asia. In the Caribbean and the Americas, he says, at least 15 of the 20 CGF members there will vote for KL. Lee expects only a few votes from Africa and the South Pacific.

Nevertheless, KL's chances remain bright. Says Lee, 'The sympathy is there for us.' Besides, KL also has the necessary organisational ability, financial strength, facilities and infrastructure, not to mention charm and hospitality.