

Olympic Dreams in Malaysia*

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Introduction

Kuala Lumpur's unsuccessful bid to host the 2008 Games is perhaps only a small footnote in the history of modern sport, but it conceals a far bigger story of the ambitions, dreams and visions of a relatively small country. It was the city of Kuala Lumpur which officially applied for the Olympic Games, the whole process, however, was initiated and promoted by the Malaysian government, then led by Prime Minister DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD. Therefore, the application process was a national rather than a city's affair. This became evident in the official bid application which states that the government support "is clearly demonstrated by the agreement of the Malaysian Prime Minister to be Chairman of the Cabinet Committee for the 2008 Olympic Games".

This body was to supervise the bidding process. In the event, when Kuala Lumpur presented their candidacy to the IOC in Lausanne on 28 August 2000, they were not chosen to proceed to the final round of voting.

Kuala Lumpur is a modern city of more than 1.5 million inhabitants. However, geographically, the city lies (relatively) close to the equator and has a tropical rainforest climate, leading to permanent high temperatures around 30 degrees Celsius at daytime, a very high air humidity (around 100 percent) and regular heavy rain showers, mostly in the afternoons. Under such climatic conditions, it is difficult to envision world-class sport performances, particularly in outdoor sports. The Olympic Games have never before been held in cities with a tropical climate, although the inaugural Youth Olympic Games in 2010 were staged in Malaysia's neighbour Singapore. An exception to the climatic norm might be the games hosted by Mexico City in 1968, but this city is located in a subtropical mountain climate zone. Additionally, Malaysia is an Islamic state and until now no Olympic Games had ever taken place in a country with a predominantly Muslim population. And last but not least, Malaysia did not have a strong competitive record in the Games and had not yet won an Olympic gold medal.

Nevertheless, Kuala Lumpur made a serious attempt to bid for the Olympic Games in 2008. Why did the Malaysian government want to host the games? What was the motivation for the application?

In this paper, we will first trace the origins and the process of Kuala Lumpur's bidding process, focus on the national development concept of Malaysia and explain in how far it corresponds with mega sporting events. Then, we will contextualize Kuala Lumpur's and Malaysia's history as a sporting and sport hosting nation. The summary of our findings will provide answers to the above mentioned research questions.

Malaysia's Development Concept

Malaysia was a British colony until its independency in 1957. Not least, because of its huge Chinese population, the city of Singapore split from Malaysia in 1965 and became an independent city state.

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic state of which around 60 percent of the people are ethnic Malays who are nearly without exception Muslims. Large ethnic and religious minorities include Malaysians of Chinese descent (Confucianism or Buddhism) and people with Indian, mostly Tamil, descent, who usually follow Hinduism. Despite its multi-religious composition, Malaysia's state religion is the Islam. Additionally, Malaysia is a monarchy, in which one of the 11 sultans (traditional Islamic leaders acting as head of states in the federal states) rules as King for a fixed time of five years until the next Sultan takes over. The monarchy is thus the symbol of perpetuation of the Muslim Malay identity in a multi-ethnic state.

In a large-scale attempt to overcome the economic inequality between the general rural Malay population and the predominant urban Chinese minority, the Malaysian government launched its so-called New Economic Policy (NEP or DEB for Dasar Ekonomi Baru in Malay) in 1971 as an affirmative action programme for ethnic Malays. MOHAMAD MAHATHIR, who became Malaysia's Prime Minister in 1981, was a strong advocate of this policy.

The personal ambitions of Prime Minister MAHATHIR are of particular importance for the Olympic bid of Kuala Lumpur. MAHATHIR wanted to transform Malaysia from a nation that was industrializing to a developed country as soon as possible. In 1991, MAHATHIR pro-claimed its "Vision 2020" (Wawasan 2020 in Malay) during the tabling of the Sixth Malaysia Plan. The vision called for the nation to achieve a self-sufficient industrial, Malaysian-centric economy by the year 2020 and to reach the top twenty states in terms of economic performance in the world. In order to achieve this vision, MAHATHIR stated that the nation required a national annual growth of 7% (in real terms) over a thirty-year period, so that the economy would be eight times stronger than in 1990. But economic development was not the only goal. "The very idealisation of national-popular unity" as promoted in the Vision's ideal of Bangsa Malaysia (one nation Malaysia) was also among the key issues. In order to turn Malaysia into a world power, MAHATHIR made a suggestion in the eighties that the population should triple over the next 100 years from 25 to more than 70 million as a pre-condition of making the country more successful.

As an early model of a developmental state, the Malaysian government under MOHAMAD MAHATHIR initiated a state-led macroeconomic master plan, in which the state showed its "responsibility for overseeing and providing

the legal and regulatory framework for rapid economic and social development". The development model of Malaysia, which also included an authoritarian government suppressing individual freedom, was remarkably successful in economic terms. In particular, between 1988 and 1997, the Malaysian economy saw huge economic growth rates.

During this period, MAHATHIR embarked on various large-scale national projects. The Prime Minister and his government wanted to show the world that Malaysia was capable of producing first class products and aimed for the respect of everybody, including those in the developed nations.

The Petronas twin towers in Kuala Lumpur symbolised this ambition. The 88-storey towers, finished in 1998, were the highest building in the world until an even higher sky-scraper was constructed in Taiwan in 2004. Since Petronas (acronym for PetroliaM Nasional) was a state company, entirely owned by the Malaysian government, the construction of the Petronas towers can be described as a demonstration of power by Prime Minister MAHATHIR. In May 2003, he claimed in a Bernama News Agency article that „the Petronas LNG complex now serves as another shining example of a vision realized of a national aspiration, transformed into reality by the same belief among Malaysians that,we can do it.“

The construction of the Petronas towers was intended to show the world the capabilities of Malaysia. The world's tallest building "thus performed landscapes of development. 'Modern', 'world class' Kuala Lumpur travelled through its landmark towers in the form of postcards, on television, building height charts and photographs." As Anthony D. KING explained at that time: "the massive high rise tower is now being used by some Asian countries as a magic wand, stuck metaphorically into the terrestrial globe, to transform what used to be known (in the increasingly obsolescent categories of the 1950s), as the Third World into the First World."

Another ambitious project of the Malaysian government was the construction of the so-called Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), a government designated zone in 1997, designed to leapfrog Malaysia into the age of information and knowledge. Modelled by the Malaysian government on Silicon Valley, it described itself as "the best of first-world knowledge and infrastructure at developing-nation costs". The Multimedia Super Corridor includes an area of approximately 15x50 km², which stretches from the Petronas Twin Towers to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport and also covers the towns of Putrajaya and Cyberjaya.

These three places also underline the ambitions of Malaysia: The Kuala Lumpur International Airport is a newly constructed, modern airport, inaugurated in 1998. Putrajaya is a planned city, located 25 kilometres south of Kuala Lumpur. The construction of Putrajaya as the administrative center for the Malaysian government started in 1995 and after completion in only a few years time from now, the city is expected to cater a population of around 320,000 people. The official residence of the Malaysian Prime Minister is a new building which very much resembles Buckingham Palace in London, although the building in Putrajaya has twice the size.

Cyberjaya was a planned township with a science park inaugurated in 1997. In 2010, the official homepage of Cyberjaya proclaimed that the city "expected to see a large boom in population growth with residential developments to cater up to a target population of 210,000, business developments providing for up to 120,000 employees and institutional establishments for 30,000 students." Putrajaya and Cyberjaya are "supposed to be the symbolic culmination of the [Prime Minister's] architectural stewardship of the country's rise from a backwater." Critics of MAHATHIR, however, argue that these huge building developments were mainly vanity projects to honour him and claim that the Prime Minister has lost touch with reality.

Prime Minister MAHATHIR also used sport as a way for advertising the Malaysian nation and its progress in becoming a developed country. The Malaysian government was even able to convince Formula One racing bosses to bring the Grand Prix to Malaysia. The Sepang Circuit, some 85 kilometres from Kuala Lumpur was officially opened on March 9, 1999 by the Prime Minister himself. The publicity material on the circuit's official home page related that "it was completed in a record 14 months and with the recognition of its ultramodern facilities, it was given the honour to incorporate the F1 logo in its name." Since 1999, every year at least one Formula One Grand Prix and Motorcycle Grand Prix has been staged place in Sepang

The multi-purpose national stadium was another major project in the nineties. Located in the south of Kuala Lumpur, the Bukit Jalil National Stadium was completed in 1998 for the Commonwealth Games. The stadium has a capacity of 100,200 which makes it the largest stadium in Southeast Asia and the 10th biggest football stadium in the world. In the event of a successful Olympic bid, the Bukit Jalil National Stadium would have been the centrepiece for events such as athletics.

The Olympic plans

For the XXIX Olympic Summer Games in 2008, a new candidature acceptance procedure was introduced by the IOC in order to make the process more transparent and to minimise the opportunities for corruption. Accordingly, the application for the Olympic Games in 2008 incorporated two phases: During the first phase, lasting from February until August 2000, the cities which applied were known as „bid applicants“. At this stage, the interested cities were required to answer a questionnaire. The answers were assessed by a working group, comprised of external experts and IOC administration members, over a period from from 22nd June to 10th July. They considered the "ability of the Applicant Cities — including their countries — to host, organize and stage high level international multi-sports events". Only if successfully assessed by the IOC Candidature Acceptance Working Group, would the applicant cities officially become "Candidate Cities".

In this newly introduced two-step procedure, Kuala Lumpur's application for the 2008 Olympic Summer Games made on 20th June 2000, was not accepted by the IOC. They considered four cities from Asia (Bangkok, Beijing, Kuala Lumpur, Osaka) three from Europe (Istanbul,

Paris, Seville), two from the Americas (Havana, Toronto) and one African (Cairo) applying cities, only two of the Asian bidders made it through to the final round. On 28th August IOC Executive Board officially accepted the bids from Beijing (China), Istanbul (Turkey), Osaka (Japan), Paris (France) and Toronto (Canada). The following year Olympic Summer Games 2008 were awarded to Beijing. They were the biggest games in history, perhaps the ultimate mega event.

Kuala Lumpur did not even make it into the second round of short-listed candidatures. In considering Kuala Lumpur's bid within the candidature applicant questionnaire, the chapters about motivation and concept as well as political and public support are most interesting for this paper and will be viewed in more detail.

Many authors have pointed out that Olympic Games' bids are politically motivated to a high degree, especially in Asia (although the IOC keeps on stressing that the Games themselves are non-political). However, the reasons given by Kuala Lumpur in the above mentioned questionnaire are the "nation-building ideals of the Olympic movement", the "elevation of sport" and "to ensure, that the 2008 Olympic Games are held once more (after 20 years) in an Asian city." It is not surprising that Malaysia emphasizes the "multi-racial, multi-religious" character of the Olympic Games, linking it to the country's ethnic diversity and claiming that the country acts in accordance with the Olympic idea of "promotion of national unity among all races". In Malaysia, the three major ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) and their respective political parties are all part of the government coalition Barisan Nasional (National Front), which has been running the country since independence, promoting national unity. Political scientist Arend LIJPHART therefore described Malaysia as a model for a consociational government.

The concept of the organizing structures mirrored the government-driven process of the bid. The planned Organizing Committee was to be chaired by the Minister of Youth and Sports, vested with far-reaching powers, and with the Prime Minister at the apex of the supervising Cabinet Committee. In the Committees, the over-representation of Malaysia's top-ranking politicians and civil servants was obvious, as the Organizing Committee was to include the President of the Olympic Council of Malaysia, representatives from all relevant ministries, and the Lord Mayor of Kuala Lumpur. In the official IOC report, the government's support for the bid was assessed in positive tones, although "[t]he information provided by the Applicant City concerning Government contributions was unclear", e.g. how to cover the cost of new infrastructure facilities required for the Games. The only concession made in the application was that the Malaysian government agreed to implement new laws "if necessary and in consultation with and advice from the International Olympic Committee". Although such concessions might be normal for Olympic bids, it showed clearly Malaysia's political will to host the Games.

In the candidature application questionnaire it was written that "[t]here is widespread support for staging the 2008 Olympic Games in Kuala Lumpur throughout all three major communities of Malaysia" and that "no oppo-

sition to the project exists", although it remains unclear how these positions were justified. However, the set up of the government coalition and the restriction of civil rights in Malaysia hindered the expression of opposition voices. Other claims were hard to back up.

"[o]ver two million Malaysians walked, on November 6th, 1999, in support of the 2008 Olympic Games bid (and the 2006 Asian Games bid), and similar projects will be held to demonstrate the people's support should Kuala Lumpur become a Candidate City."

Although investigations have been made by the authors, no documentary evidence in the form of newspaper articles or pictures could be found. However, in November 1999, demonstrations following the arrest of former Deputy Prime Minister ANWAR IBRAHIM and the upcoming general elections were mentioned in relevant literatures. Also the figure of two million people seems to be exaggerated, as this would be 10 % of the Malaysian population. Whereas this demonstration of public support was not questioned by the IOC, the fact that "no opinion poll has been mentioned" was crucial, as all other bid applicant cities, with the exception of Cairo and Havana, had conducted such a poll. As Kuala Lumpur is a modern city with good infrastructure, the relevant passages in the city's application were evaluated as being appropriate for hosting the Olympic Games. The IOC assessed the country's general infrastructure, that in telecommunications and transport as well as its plans to develop further infrastructures for the Games as sufficient. But Kuala Lumpur's plans for sports infrastructure and the Olympic village as well as Malaysia's limited experience from past sports events did not meet the IOC criteria. Concerns were raised about the location of some venues at a distance from Kuala Lumpur. It was felt that the documents lacked an analysis of Olympic requirements, there was limited information on environmental impact, an insufficient number of hotel rooms in the middle price range, the absence of plans for a media village as well. The arrangements for security lacked detail and the "overly optimistic" financial/ revenue plan was short on specifics.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that Kuala Lumpur did not make it as an official Applicant City. Yet, Malaysia's government could not be pleased with the outcome of the official evaluation report by the IOC. According to a document 18th of August 2000, Kuala Lumpur was rated lowest of all bidders.

Experiences with international sports events

Malaysia has some experience in hosting international mega sports events. The biggest coup was successful bid for the Commonwealth Games of 1998 in Kuala Lumpur – the Commonwealth Games were held in Asia for the first time, and only for the second time in a non-Western country after the Commonwealth Games of 1966 in Kingston (Jamaica). The government spent about 500 million US dollars in constructing the infrastructure needed and to build up a 100,200-seater stadium at the National Sports Complex of Bukit Jalil. Concerning the athletics, all expectations were met by the Malaysian athletes. Politically, however, the Games were overshadowed by street

violence in relation to the arrest of former Deputy Prime Minister ANWAR IBRAHIM. Malaysian police used water cannons and CS gas as well as batons, breaking down "Malaysia's most serious unrest since 1974." Moreover, BBC pictures showing the riots were censored, whereas pictures of the British Queen visiting the Games were transmitted.

Nevertheless, the Malaysian government claimed that it successfully hosted the Games and felt comfortable with the results. Then Deputy Youth and Sports Minister LOKE YUEN YOW said "[w]e gained from enhancing the country's image in the eyes of the world and from the number of tourists who came here." Moreover, he said the Games "have enhanced the feeling of patriotism which is important to racial unity in our country." Thus, the Malaysian government intended to go even further and LOKE argued that "[i]f we can successfully organise the Commonwealth Games, I believe we can also organise the Olympic Games", referring to the widespread notion that holding the Commonwealth Games "is also seen as giving an advantage to countries seeking to bid for future Olympic Games."

Beside the Commonwealth Games, Malaysia has hosted some smaller events. The Southeast Asian Games are held on a two-year term since 1959 (until 1977, the event was called the Southeast Asian Peninsular Games, comprising up to seven nations). The event took place five times in Kuala Lumpur, the most recent one in 2001.

Malaysia has also hosted some single-sport events, which mirror the nation's favourite sports. Most recently, Malaysia hosted the Thomas & Uber Cup Finals in May 2010, the so-called Badminton World Team Championship. In addition, the Monsoon Cup, "[t]he Formula One of Sailing", was institutionalized in Malaysia from 2005 onwards. Much more worldwide attention, however, is gained through the annual Formula One events held in Malaysia since 1999. Both the Monsoon Cup and the Malaysian Grand Prix were established as door-openers to promote the respective sports and their associated market all over in Asia.

Successive Plans

After the failed Olympia bid in 2000, Malaysia continued its intent to achieve positive international reputation through sports events. Although it did not make it as a host country for the Olympic Games, Malaysia applied for other big sports events, for example the Asian Games (Asiad) 2006 or the Youth Olympic Games 2010. Unfortunately, none of these events were ever held in Malaysia – and will not be held in near future. Not even the prestigious 125th IOC session 2013 "guaranteeing worldwide exposure for the Session's host city", where the next president of the IOC will be chosen and the host of the 2020 Olympic Games will be announced, will take place in Kuala Lumpur, but in Buenos Aires.

All bids for international sports events in Malaysia are highly politically motivated and pushed ahead by the national government. Hosting the Youth Olympic Games 2010, the first Youth Olympics ever, was seen as a chance to prepare for bigger multi-sports events by the Malaysian government. Yet, even in Malaysia there were differing opinions

about such bids: The president of the Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM), TUNKU IMRAN JAAFAR, said the OCM "had 'reluctantly' submitted a bid" at the government's request, although it believed "the money spent on the bid could be used for sports development or preparations for youths participating in upcoming Games". In the end, Kuala Lumpur was not accepted as a short-list candidate and the Youth Summer Olympics 2010 were hosted by Singapore. But this statement of OCM president earmarked the beginning of a changed strategy towards sports development.

In spite of the failed application for the Asian Games of 2006, which were held in Doha (Qatar) – although Kuala Lumpur was supposed to be the favourite – Malaysia applied again for the Asian Games of 2010. This new bid was cancelled in 2004, because the new Malaysian government (following Prime Minister MOHAMAD MAHATHIR's retirement in October 2003) did not support the bid anymore. Former Sports Minister AZALINA OTHMAN said "the Cabinet has decided that Malaysia does not bid to host the 2010 Asian Games because of the cost implications. It is not that we do not want the job, but it is very expensive", underlining the political character of this decision. With South Korea's and Jordan's withdrawal earlier, Guangzhou (China) was the only remaining candidate, which thus hosted the Games in November 2010.

The same happened with the bid for the 2019 Asian Games (from 2019 onwards, the Asian Games will be held one year before the Olympic Summer Games). Kuala Lumpur submitted the bid in January 2010 "with the approval of the government" under Prime Minister DATUK SERI NAJIB TUN RAZAK (in office since 2009), as Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM) secretary DATUK SIEH KOK CHI said.

Malaysia's current Sports Minister AHMAD SHABERY CHEEK declared on the Malaysian Sports Industry Convention in Kuala Lumpur "that the 2019 success could boost the local sports", that "a bid would help in our effort to reach our sports development targets" and that a "successful bid for the 2019 Asian Games could reinvigorate Malaysian sports in the way that the 1998 Commonwealth Games did." On the convention, the economic aspect of such multi-sports events was emphasized, demanding for a directory delivering quantifiable data to assess "how much sports are contributing to the nation's economic development", "how many jobs are created by the sports industry and how to expand the industry" as well as to "measure the impact" and "the return on investment".

Yet only half a year later, in September 2010, the Malaysian Cabinet decided not to go through with the bid to host the 2019 Asian Games and the same sports minister declared that Malaysia would not make any further bids due to financial constraints: "It will cost us RM 1.2 billion [US\$ 380 million] to host the Games and it will not be good for political mileage," he said. "Already the government are giving a lot of subsidies for items like petrol and sugar. We don't want to burden the government."

Sports in Malaysia

As sport has been an indicator of modernity and a nation's development status since the reintroduction of

Olympic Games, the sporting focus in Malaysia has changed towards sports development in recent years. The government's goal now is to see Malaysian athletes in the spotlights of the global sports arena and to get attention through medal success in international events. However, the desire to host the Olympic Games in Malaysia lives on. Indeed, international success in sports by Malaysians is rare. People are enthusiastic television viewers of sport: Football, Motor Sports and also badminton, the sport in which Malaysia has enjoyed most success. But very few practice sports themselves. This might be because of the tropical climate, but also the lifestyle in Malaysia, which has transformed because of the rapid economic development in recent decades, accompanied by little physical exercise (Malaysia has one of the highest rates of car ownership among all Southeast Asian nations), combined with modified eating habits (especially in the middle and upper class). The favourite activity actively practised by Malaysians is Kite-flying, which is "one of the oldest Malaysian sports coming from the time of Melakan court". Other popular sports include Silat, Sepak Takraw, football, horse racing, car racing, powerboat racing, cricket, squash, field hockey, table tennis and badminton.

Officials responsible for sports development in Malaysia recognized that these conditions had the effect of undermining their Olympic ambitions. Youth and Sports director general, DATUK FATHUL RAZI BAKRI, asserted that "only 20 percent of Malaysians actively take part in sports but that the government aims to get half the population participating by 2020." Thus, the government has developed the so-called '1Malaysia' concept, whose mission is to promote a national identity and the Malaysian version of "unity in diversity". Moreover, it is an interactive online forum where the public can write down their demands to the Prime Minister, a concession made to meet democratic claims in a country which is still fundamentally authoritarian in nature. In this context, sports promotion is an easy way to visualize the "unity in diversity"-approach: "Under the 1Malaysia concept, sport would not be restricted only to a certain group of people. We are targeting all individuals in the country to participate in at least one sport as part of their daily activities" said DATUK FATHUL RAZI BAKRI on the Johor Fitness Tour Programme. This policy had a twin logic. Not only would it have a positive impact on people's health, but also the more Malaysians actively practice sports, the bigger the chance to find potential medal winners among them. In addition, the success in international sports events has a clear unifying effect: "Malaysians are proud of the advancements in sports made by their fellow citizens, regardless of race, religion or creed." The national goal of an active nation fits in well with the statement of the Prime Minister, who addressed the 14th International Paralympic Committee (IPC) general assembly and conference in Kuala Lumpur: „you have to be a strong sporting nation. In other words, you have to make an impact. You have to win medals and be a force to be reckoned with in the global sports arena. However, Malaysia is not there yet" (sic!).

An examination of the Olympic medal list shows that Malaysia is far from being a global sporting nation. Malaysians have only won four medals in badminton, which

was introduced to the full Olympic programme. They took bronze medals in men's doubles (1992) and men's singles (1996), and two silver medals came in men's doubles (1996) and men's singles (2008). At the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, the unofficial medal standings saw Malaysia ranked 74th. As a Malaysian blogger said:

"In the ongoing XXIX Olympiad, no foreigner will be faulted if s/he misses the name of our country in the medal list. But we can point out to all who would listen: place one finger on the top of the medal list, run it down, turn the page and start again, slow down and somewhere in the middle you will find for real a silver medal awarded to Malaysia."

Hence, it is not surprising that Malaysia "is desperately waiting for its first gold medal" won at Olympic Games.

On a smaller scale, Malaysia is a leading sporting nation within Southeast Asia. At the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi, Malaysian competitors did even better than in 1998 when they had been host nation. Malaysians returned home with 12 gold, 10 silver and 14 bronze medals. In the unofficial ranking tables, they were the seventh most successful team. The 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou were also successful for Malaysian athletes. They ranked 10th in the medal list, winning nine gold, 18 silver and 14 bronze medals, a slight, but continuous improvement compared with previous Asian Games. Thus, Malaysia was the second best Southeast Asian nation at the Asiad, behind Thailand (ranked ninth). The most successful sports were squash, martial arts disciplines such as karate and wushu, bowling, cycling and diving. Surprisingly, in the recent Southeast Asian Games of 2009, Malaysia ranked only fifth out of the 12 Southeast Asian countries. In previous years, Malaysia was regularly found among the top-three nations. Malaysian athletes were successful mainly in swimming, athletics, diving, and in martial arts disciplines, but also in badminton and surprisingly also in football.

Sports development

One of the main concerns of sports development in Malaysia is the absence of professional structures. In Malaysia, school sports are not facilitated at an appropriate level nor are there any professional training facilities to speak of. Malaysian executives have recognized the need for action to rectify these shortcomings. Whereas the promotion of sport in everyday (school) life needs a major shift in attitudes, the provision of funding and will take time to achieve significant change, sponsorship for professional athletes will achieve results within a comparatively short time. Thus, the Malaysian government concentrates on the latter.

For the next Olympic Games, the mission is to win the first gold medal for Malaysia. Focusing on this target, more financial resources than ever before are being invested in sport. A sponsorship package called "Road to London 2012" is provided by the national government and training facilities are built. It focuses on selected sports which were identified as having achieved recent success and which promised more: archery, badminton, cycling, diving. In addition, squash, which tried, albeit unsuccessfully for inclusion in 2016, is separately supported through a seven-year

programme to build a world-class squash team. The "Road to London 2012" programme was launched in 2009. It is intended to offer professional training conditions and provide "whatever necessary in terms of funding, support services, such as coaching, sports science, sports medicine, etc.) and competitions to achieve the objective"(sic) In the period leading up to 2012, a total amount of RM 16 million (US\$ 5.1 million) has been invested to train 19 elite athletes. The sponsorship is reviewed after major sports events, so that other, recently successful athletes like the divers could be integrated into the programme. Deputy Prime Minister TAN SRI MUHYIDDIN YASSIN, who also chaired the Cabinet Committee on Sports meeting, said athletes "would be given undivided support in terms of international exposure and sports science expertise", which includes a monthly athlete allowance of RM 2,000 (US\$ 640) and provision for training overseas. The latter is further emphasised through a Memorandum of Understanding between Malaysian National Sports Institute (NSI) and the University of Bath (Great Britain) to facilitate professional training conditions for Malaysian top athletes. Bath is intended to be Malaysia's High Performance Training Centre (HPTC) in Europe and will also be used for the preparation for other events in the future as well as Olympic Games.

Conclusion

The Kuala Lumpur bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games was strongly driven by the ambitions of the Malaysian government and particularly by Prime Minister MOHAMAD MAHATHIR, who can be seen as the mastermind behind the Olympic plans. MAHATHIR, who was given the title Bapa Pemodenan (Father of Modernization) after his retirement in 2003, wanted to demonstrate the rapid development of Malaysia from a poor country to a developed nation with a global audience.

With a series of national prestige projects, considerable sums were spent to underline Malaysian economic progress. Additionally, strong national leaders like MAHATHIR have a tendency "to build monuments and erect physical edifices that will serve to permanently fetch their legacy in history." After building the then highest towers in the world, MAHATHIR stated that the Petronas towers project "will definitely put Kuala Lumpur on the world map", what can be understood as part of a broader attempt to make the national capital of Malaysia into a "world city". The hosting of the Olympic Games would have helped them head in the same direction. The Olympics were a strategy of 'visualisation' of the Malaysian development for global audiences. Prestigious projects such as the hosting of Olympic Games are "used to mediate the meaning of the Nation to the gazes of the World."

Furthermore, Olympic Games and similar events are often used as an instrument for the promotion of a national identity. This is of particular importance in multi-ethnic societies such as Malaysia,

"[t]he nationalistic identification with sport is a form of expression that does not challenge state stability; it often fosters unity and can distract from other problems. For this reason, political elites have actively intervened in staging big sporting events as an instrument for creating national identity and unity."

As in MAHATHIR's concept of Wawasan 2020, nation-building is a crucial point for the well-being and further development of the nation, and thus the Games would have had a welcome effect on these efforts and, simultaneously, would have avoided democratic claims. In a sense, MAHATHIR's political performance is reminiscent of "bread and circuses". The Olympic Games would also have proved that Malaysia was not a backward and underdeveloped country, but a modern and self-confident state, easily capable of dealing with the challenge of hosting huge sport events.

In the meantime, the Malaysian government has changed its strategy after a series of disappointments in their attempts to host international sport events, particularly after the retirement of Mahathir Mohamad in 2003. Current Malaysian Prime Minister DATUK SERI NAJIB TUN RAZAK has admitted that Malaysia is not yet ready to hold the Olympic Games, since such a project would be a "tall order for the country" until they could become more of a sports powerhouse. This statement would seem to suggest that the country will not proceed with a bid for the 2020 Summer Olympic Games and that the Olympic dreams are temporarily put on hold.

The arguments show the change in the Malaysian government's attitude towards their previous sports ambitions and, as well, the renunciation of what could be seen as a megalomaniac policy under MAHATHIR. Hence, Malaysia has learnt to lower its sights and to some extent moved away from using sport as a prestige project. However, sport as a tool for enhancing both Malaysia's nation-building and prestige-seeking still goes on, although the 'new realism' in Malaysia's current government is marked by the turn toward (urgently needed) sports development, because, not least due to its geographic environment, Malaysia is far beyond being an authentic sporting nation. Even TUNKU IMRAN TUANKU JA'AFAR, president of the Olympic Council of Malaysia, admitted: "Sport is not yet part of our national psyche or culture. Malaysia has to build up interest in sport to even get close to what is happening in the US, Australia and other sporting nations."

Notes:

1 OLYMPIC COUNCIL OF MALAYSIA (OCM): Candidature acceptance questionnaire. Official document. June 20, 2000, Kuala Lumpur 2000, p. 1 - 12, p. 3. [Available at: <http://www.troywatts.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Kuala-Lumpur2008.pdf>, 10/27/2010].

2 In December 2010, the FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) gave the football world cup in 2022 to Qatar, which is in a very hot climate zone and has no football tradition at all. Considering this decision, one might doubt that reasonable criteria are applied in the decision-making process of megasports events.

3 ZIEGENHAIN, Patrick: "Malaysia", IN: RIESCHER, Gisela & THUMFART, Alexander (EDS.): Monarchien. Baden-Baden 2008, pp. 163 - 172.

4 MOHAMAD, Mahathir: "The Way forward". Speech delivered at the Malaysian Business Council, no date. [Available at: <http://www.pmo.gov.my/?menu=page&page=1898>, 10/29/2010].

5 HILLEY, John: Malaysia. Mahathirism, hegemony and the new opposition. London and New York: ZED Books 2001, p. 5. For further information on Malaysia's nation-building see DERICHS, Claudia: Nationenbildung in Malaysia als strategisches Staatshandeln. Bemühungen um die Schaffung nationaler Identität. Hamburg 2004.

- 6 MD. SHUKRI SHUIB: "The Concept of Mahathiriskonomisme: An Economic Recovery Model during Crisis", in: *Journal of Politics and Law* 2(March 2009)1, pp. 75 - 85, p. 77.
- 7 For further information see, for example, WOO-CUMINGS, Meredith: *The Developmental State*. Ithaca, New York 1999.
- 8 MOHAMAD: "The Way".
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