

Candidly Admit Mistakes Of YOG

TODAY Online

I refer to the letter "Why the YOG was a success" (April 9) by Mr Koh Peng Keng. There is little doubt that the inaugural Youth Olympic Games (YOG) was a tremendous undertaking, given the geographical limitations of Singapore and the sheer number of athletes and officials involved. Even though the takeaways might have been comparatively intangible, the individuals who have benefited the most would be the youth volunteers from Singapore and the young athletes from around the world.

However, the assortment of successes - facilitated largely by on-the-ground stakeholders and staff members - should not blind the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) to the plethora of negatives throughout the event.

The explosion of the budget remains contentious; while Singaporeans may not be unhappy with the amounts budgeted per se, the organising committee failed to transparently justify the three-fold increase. Some form of incompetency, oversight or gross miscalculation must have led to the poorly-calculated budget estimate in the beginning.

The comparison of the overall expenditure of the YOG and the 2008 Summer Olympics based on the "size" of the events is incongruent; a large part of the Beijing budget went into infrastructural construction and extensive refurbishment. More importantly - proportionately - the 2008 Beijing Games attracted significantly more tourists and groups into the city, and generated greater media reach, marketing value and tourism receipts. YOG attendance figures - propped up by bulk sales to the Ministry of Education - pale in comparison to that of the Beijing Olympics.

Other valuable lessons could be gleaned from the experience. First, dedicate more resources and manpower to generate greater hype and publicity beyond our shores; it was apparent that the international sporting community paid little attention to the developments in the YOG.

Second, correspondingly, awareness and interest campaigns should have been pursued with greater zest and enthusiasm in Singapore, so as to get individuals and households excited. Third, with reports on sub-par food packages for volunteers, more effort should be dedicated to volunteer welfare and maintenance.

Singaporeans are not denying the hard work and dedication put in by the multitude of volunteers to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the YOG; on the contrary, it is this commitment that should drive us to be more balanced when delivering evaluations. If Singapore is to genuinely emerge as a sporting hub or nation in time to come, the only way forward is to candidly acknowledge our past mistakes and work on them. Honesty and transparency matter.

Kwan Jin Yao