

Guangzhou taking Asiad to new level

OCA OFFICIAL HEAPS PRAISE ON CITY FOR ORGANIZATION, VENUES AND QUALITY OF COMPETITION

By LI WENFANG
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GUANGZHOU — The Guangzhou Games are raising the bar of the quadrennial Asiad and helping Asian countries and regions fare better in qualifying for the 2012 Olympics in London, a senior official of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) said.

The quality of excellence both on and off the field at the 16th Asian Games has already surpassed that of Doha 2006, and this will benefit the Asian sporting community as well as the host city, said Husain Al-Musallam, director general of the OCA.

"All of the events have been fantastic, including the setup and the venues," said Al-Musallam, speaking over the weekend.

"It will be a challenge to the city that follows ... The games must keep growing and getting better."

He said the games are crucial for uniting the Asian community, giving countries and regions a chance to flash their credentials on an international stage and build friendships on the sidelines.

Al-Musallam, who is from Kuwait, gave the example of Turkmenistan beating Vietnam 6-2 in men's soccer last Wednesday. This allowed two relative minnows a chance to shine in a sport dominated in Asia by more experienced sides such as the Republic of Korea and Japan.

"This is important given Asia's status as the world's largest and most populous continent, filled with different cultures, politics and religions that require deeper understanding to avoid tension and conflict," he said.

"They can compete as friends, live together in the Athletes' Village and speak and listen to one another through the language of sport," Al-Musallam said, adding this "will benefit the future development of the continent, and will give their children a better future."

Meanwhile, Guangzhou residents are set to benefit from improved roads, sports facilities and other infrastructure projects that have been worked on to make the city games-ready.

As the increased exposure draws more foreign invest-



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Husain Al-Musallam, director general of OCA, says the Guangzhou Asiad has created long-term benefits for the city.

ment and tourists to the city, its resident will continue to reap the benefits, he said. Pollution levels remain relatively high but are being reduced, and the city is seeing more direct flights to West Asian cities.

"Guangzhou will become a famous tourist destination," he said. "The games always have a positive impact on the organizing city."

In contrast to the Olympics, which has been downsizing the scale of its events in recent years, Al-Musallam said the Asiad will maintain its size or grow to reflect the various interests of participating nations.

"It is the duty of the OCA to promote and respect all of these cultures," he said, adding the inclusion of non-Olympic sports such as wushu and cricket has helped spread their appeal to regions of the world that never played them before.

Al-Musallam hailed the opening ceremony of the Guangzhou Games as the best in the history of the Asiad, and a step up from Zhang Yimou's mesmerizing directorial job in launching the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

After the opening ceremonies for the Asiad and the Olympics in Doha and Beijing showcased their hosts' achievements in the realm of high technology, infrastructure and culture, there were concerns that Guangzhou would not be able to match this level of splendor, he said.

In fact, Guangzhou trumped them both and deserves full marks for both the curtain-raiser and the organization of the games so far, Al-Musallam said.

The highlight, for him, was a 10-minute segment featuring 160 Chinese martial artists flying up to 80 meters off the ground on steel cables, he said.

AUSSIE SWITCH TO ASIA RULED OUT

GUANGZHOU — Asian Olympic chief Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah said on Monday that adding sporting powerhouse Australia to the region would boost the quality of competition but also damage Oceania.

The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) president told reporters at the Asian Games in Guangzhou that involving Australia, sixth in the medals table at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, would "increase our level of sport and level of results".

But he said such a move would badly damage Oceania.

"It's our job to keep stability for the Olympic movement," the president said.

"It's not only what the

OCA will do but also what we have to do for other continents and how we can cooperate as a movement," he said.

The OCA, a grouping of 45 Asian Olympic committees, oversees the Asian Games, which features 42 sports in its 16th edition in southern China.

The Australian Olympic Committee has previously been quoted as saying some of its member sports were keen for tougher competition outside Oceania.

There is a precedent for such a move. In 2006, Football Federation Australia dumped Oceania to join the Asian Football Confederation.