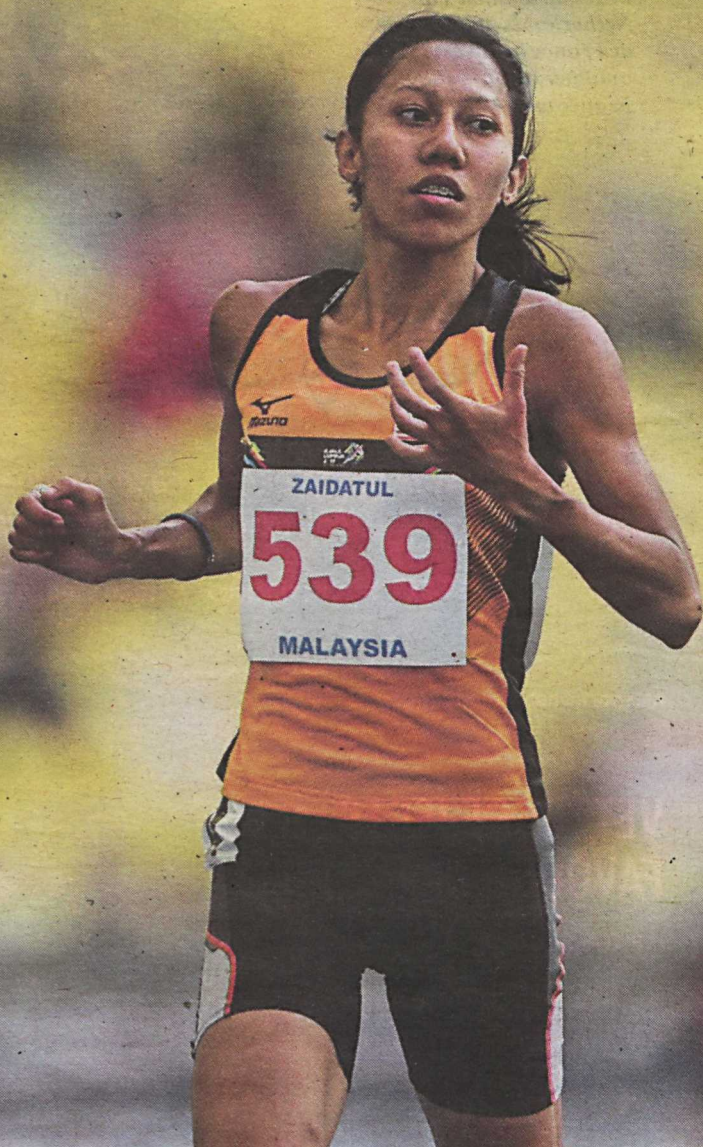


ATHLETICS



Zaidatul Husniah Zulkifli ended Malaysia's 20-year wait for a medal in the 100m at the Sea Games.

Young stars thrill coach

NATIONAL coach M. Balamurugan is ecstatic with the eight-gold haul by the athletics contingent at the Sea Games, including some of his athletes.

He said many young athletes surpassed the six-gold target set for athletics, and the future looks bright for the sport.

Balamurugan also lauded Zaidatul Husniah Zulkifli's silver in the 100m with a time of 11.74s, which ended a 20-year wait for a podium finish.

The last was the gold won by G. Shanti in the 1997 Jakarta Sea Games.

Zaidatul also won silver in the 200m when she clocked 23.64s.

Balamurugan's other athletes also made the nation proud, when G. Aravinn Thevarr was the surprise bronze package in the 200m after Khairul Hafiz Jantan failed.

Jonathan Nyepa proved that he is a budding talent when he helped the 4x100 men's quartet

break the national mark together with Badrul Hisyam, Nixon Kennedy and Haiqal Hanafi (39.27s) even though no medal was won.

"As a coach, I am happy that there was an overall improvement in athletics. Husniah ended a 20-year podium dream while also clocking her personal best.

"Aravinn also showed that he could spring a surprise as three weeks before the Games he pulled a hamstring. And I hope the 4x100 quartet will not be disbanded, as they have age on their side," said Balamurugan.

The Games ended with Malaysia becoming overall champions with 145 gold medals while athletics was also categorised as a "successful" sport as it contributed eight gold, eight silver and nine bronze medals.

Malaysia's athletes also shattered four Games and seven national records. **Mohd Khairie Khalid**