

# Disability sport in Malaysia

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## 1. Government policy towards persons with disabilities

In Malaysia, there is government support for persons with disabilities, and this is evident from the policies and programmes which have been introduced. Since the launch of the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons in 1982, Malaysia has introduced various policies and programmes to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities. The National Social Welfare Policy was promulgated in 1990 to create an independent, equitable, caring society. The Policy states that facilities and early detection will be provided for persons with disabilities to receive treatment, rehabilitation, education and training, and efforts to integrate persons with disabilities into society should be encouraged. Policies and programmes for persons with disabilities in the country are guided by the strategic goals of the National Social Welfare Policy which emphasized the attainment of self-reliance, equalization of opportunities for the less fortunate and fostering the spirit of mutual help and support towards enhancing a caring culture.

After years of lobbying by disability organisations, the Persons with Disabilities Act was promulgated in 2008. The Act provides “for the registration, protection, rehabilitation, development and well-being of persons with disabilities, the establishment of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, and for matters connected therewith” (Part I Preliminary p. 7). The functions of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities include overseeing, co-ordinating, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of national policies and plans pertaining to persons with disabilities. Under the Act, an updated and current Register of Persons with Disabilities will also be maintained.

Malaysia's commitment to improve the quality of life among the country's population of persons with disabilities is further ensured through the signing of international conventions. Malaysia was a signatory to the Proclamation on Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asia and Pacific Region and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

## 2. Government support for disability sport

One area of government support is in disability sport. The Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 ensures the right of persons with disabilities to participate in recreation, leisure and sports activities. The Act states that the National Council for Persons with Disabilities shall encourage participation of persons with disabilities in sports as well as provide instruction, training and resources.

The National Sports Policy 1988 stresses the importance of "Sport for All". One of the objectives of the Policy is to provide opportunities and facilities to meet basic social, psychological and physiological needs through sport. Implementation strategies proposed in the policy took into account planning, organisation, personnel, funding, incentives and facilities. These strategies included developing professional and qualified sports personnel, co-operation among the sports bodies in the country, and providing incentives to sportspersons.

The government's involvement in disability sport includes funding the Malaysian Paralympiad (a biennial national multi-sport and multi-disability competition) and funding athletes to participate in international competitions. There is also a unit under the Ministry of Youth and Sports which looks after the development of disability sport. The government recently built the Kampung Pandan Centre of Excellence for Paralympic Sports. The Centre has a swimming pool and facilities for archery, badminton, basketball and goalball. Under the National Sports Council, the Paralympic division (established in 2007) provides training and support for athletes with disabilities, including nutrition and sports psychology. The government also promotes equal opportunities for athletes with disabilities in terms of training and allowance during training. Athletes with disabilities also receive cash incentives from the government for winning medals at international competitions. The first time they received incentives was for the 1992 Paralympic Games.

### 3. Development of disability sport

Disability sport in Malaysia started in the 1970s when sports were organised on an ad-hoc basis and Malaysians did not take part in many competitions. Most sports started within each disability group.

Athletes with physical disabilities were the first group to take part in sports. Mr. H. M. Storey, a founder member of the Society of the Orthopaedically Handicapped Malaysia, started sports for athletes with physical disabilities. The Society started sending athletes to the Stoke Mandeville Games in the early 1970s where Malaysian athletes took part in athletics and powerlifting. Athletes with physical disabilities in Malaysia now participate in a variety of sports, including archery, athletics, lawn bowls, powerlifting, sailing, shooting, swimming, table tennis, volleyball, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair dance, wheelchair fencing and wheelchair tennis.

Sports for persons with visual impairment started slightly later. Recreational sports for persons with visual impairment was organised by associations and schools for the visually impaired. Popular recreational sports include chess, darts, dominoes, scrabble and table tennis. The first national sports competition for persons with visual impairment was held in Penang in 1979 where participants took part in athletics and swimming. Goalball started in Malaysia in the early 1990s. Gradually, more and more sports were introduced in the late 1990s and early 2000s including futsal, judo, lawn bowls, tandem cycling and tenpin bowling.

Sports for persons with short stature started in the 1980s. The idea to establish an association for this group was mooted in the early 1980s, and in 1985 a sports and welfare club was established. Football was the first sport to be played, and when the club was formed, more football events were organised. After joining the Malaysian Paralympic Council in 1997, more sports were introduced for this disability category. They include athletics, swimming and tenpin bowling.

Sports for persons with cerebral palsy started at the Spastic Children's Associations. The first sports to be introduced were athletics and swimming in the mid-1980s. Boccia was introduced in the early 1990s. Other sports that persons with cerebral palsy in Malaysia play are tenpin bowling, football and table tennis. In addition to high performance sport, the Spastic Children's Associations also encourage

boccia, carom and chess for recreation. The Associations organise annual sports days for the students.

Sports for persons with intellectual disability also started in schools. Schools for children with intellectual disability organized school sports competitions for students. Persons with intellectual disability participate in athletics, football, swimming, table tennis and tenpin bowling. The first Special Olympics in Malaysia was held in Kuala Lumpur in November 1992 and offered track and field events.

#### 4. Disability sports organisations in Malaysia

The national governing body for sports for persons with disabilities is the Malaysian Paralympic Council. In 1986, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Social Welfare Services Department, the Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation and national non-governmental disability organisations initiated the formation of a national disability sports organisation. Representatives from five disability categories (cerebral palsy, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, physical disability and visual impairment) were part of the initial group. The Malaysian Sports Council for the Disabled, a non-profit organisation, was established on 18 May 1989. The Council was renamed the Malaysian Paralympic Council in 1996.

Currently, the Malaysian Paralympic Council has 23 affiliates which are made up of 14 disability sports organisations and 9 non-disability sports organisations. The list of affiliates is shown in Table 1. The objectives of the Malaysian Paralympic Council are to prepare athletes for international events, encourage an active lifestyle for persons with disabilities, introduce new sports and recreation programmes and establish more training facilities for greater participation. The Malaysian Paralympic Council organises the biennial Malaysian Paralympiad and annual Malaysian Paralympic carnival.

The Paralympiad is an inter-state multi-disability and multi-sport competition. The Paralympic carnival, on the other hand, provides opportunities for persons with disabilities to take part in sports and to create awareness about disability sports in the local community. The Malaysian Paralympic Council also trains qualified human resource such as coaches, classifiers and technical officials. When a new sport is introduced, a demonstration is usually held. This is followed by workshops and clinics

**Table 1 List of Malaysian Paralympic Council affiliates**

<b>Affiliates</b>
1. Boccia Association of Malaysia
2. Disability Chess Association of Malaysia
3. Goalball Association of Malaysia
4. Malaysia Disabled Volleyball Association
5. Malaysia Para Athletics Association
6. Malaysia Para Powerlifting Association
7. Malaysian Blind Sports Association
8. Malaysian Para Carrom Association
9. Malaysian Para Tenpin Bowling Association
10. Malaysian Wheelchair Basketball
11. Malaysian Wheelchair Fencing Association
12. Malaysian Wheelchair Rugby Federation
13. Paralympic Athletics Coaches Association of Malaysia
14. Wheelchair Tennis Malaysia
15. Amateur Swimming Union of Malaysia
16. Badminton Association of Malaysia
17. Malaysia Canoe Association
18. Malaysia Sailing Association
19. Malaysian National Cycling Federation
20. Malaysian Rowing Association
21. National Archery Association of Malaysia
22. Petanque Federation of Malaysia
23. Table Tennis Association of Malaysia

to train coaches, classifiers and technical officials. Many courses were held to train personnel when Malaysia hosted the 2006 FESPIC Games. Malaysia has internationally accredited classifiers in archery, badminton, lawn bowls, powerlifting, shooting, swimming, table tennis, tenpin bowling, and wheelchair basketball. There are also Malaysians who are internationally accredited technical officials for sports such as athletics, archery, boccia, goalball, lawn bowls, powerlifting, table tennis, volleyball and wheelchair basketball.

There are efforts to promote disability sports throughout Malaysia. The Malaysian Paralympic Council suggested establishing state-level disability organisations to do this. These state disability sports and recreation councils were planned along the lines of the state sports councils for able-bodied sports. Its purpose was to be a government agency supported by the state Youth and Sports departments, state Welfare departments, non-governmental organisations and sports associations.

## 5. National competitions for athletes with disabilities

A national multi-sports and multi-disability sports competition has been organised biennially in Malaysia since 1982. Originally called the National Sport for the Disabled, the name of the competition was changed to the Malaysian Paralympiad in 1998. Various states in Malaysia have hosted the Malaysian Paralympiad. The aim of the Malaysian Paralympiad is to identify talent as well as to increase the number of local coaches, classifiers and technical officials.

From 1982 to 1996, only athletics and swimming competitions were held. The number of sports increased in 1998 and again in 2000. The most number of sports was included in 2004 when events in 20 sports (athletics, swimming, judo, sitting volleyball, archery, wheelchair tennis, wheelchair basketball, lawn bowls, badminton, powerlifting, table tennis, goalball, fencing, boccia, cycling, soccer, shooting, tenpin bowling, sailing and chess) were held. The Games has grown in terms of the number of sports as well as the number of participants. From 550 participants at the first Games in 1982, the number increased to nearly 2,000 athletes in 2008 and 2012. South East Asian countries participated in the Malaysian Paralympiad from 1990 to 1996 and in 2000, and Asian countries participated in the Games in 2002. Details of the Malaysian Paralympiad are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Participation in the Malaysian Paralympiad

Year	Host	No. of participating states/countries	No. of sports	No. of participants
1982	Kuala Lumpur	14	2	550
1984	Selangor	14	2	650
1986	Penang	14	2	750
1988	Kelantan	15	2	828
1990	Malacca	17 (included South East Asian countries)	2	853
1992	Terengganu	17 (included South East Asian countries)	2	980
1994	Johore	15 (included South East Asian countries)	2	1,200
1996	Sarawak	19 (included South East Asian countries)	2	978
1998	Selangor	14	10	877
2000	Kuala Lumpur	23 (included South East Asian countries)	17	1,239
2002	Kuala Lumpur	23 (included Asian countries)	16	937
2004	Kuala Lumpur	15	20	1,081
2006	Kuala Lumpur	15	16	1,203
2008	Kuala Lumpur	15	14	1,910
2010	Malacca	15	16	1,368
2012	Pahang	15	17	1,900
2014	Perlis	15	9	Not available

## 6. Participation in international multi-sport and multi-disability competitions

Malaysians have been taking part in international competitions since the 1970s. The largest multi-sport and multi-disability competition that Malaysia takes part in is the Paralympic Games. Malaysia first sent athletes to the Paralympic Games in 1972. After a 16-year hiatus, Malaysia took part in the Paralympic Games again in 1988 and has been taking part in every Games since then (see Table 3 for details of Malaysia's participation in the Paralympic Games).

Malaysians have competed in athletics and powerlifting at all the Paralympic Games that the country has taken part in. In total, Malaysia has won seven Paralympic medals. The first medal was won by P. Mariappan when he won a bronze medal in powerlifting in 1988. He is also the only Malaysian to win two Paralympic

**Table 4 Malaysian athletes' participation in the FESPIC Games**

Year	Host	No. of Malaysian athletes	Medals Won		
			Gold	Silver	Bronze
1982	Sha Tin, Hong Kong	30	7	13	7
1986	Surakarta, Indonesia	46	19	22	12
1989	Kobe, Japan	26	4	15	18
1994	Beijing, China	52	1	15	18
1999	Bangkok, Thailand	54	1	10	9
2002	Busan, South Korea	158	2	28	37
2006	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	288	44	60	71

**Table 5 Malaysian athletes' participation in the Asian Para Games**

Year	Host	No. of Malaysian athletes	Medals Won		
			Gold	Silver	Bronze
2010	Guangzhou, China	115	9	13	23
2014	Incheon, South Korea	128	15	20	27

**Table 6 Malaysian athletes' participation in the ASEAN Para Games**

Year	Host	No. of Malaysian athletes	Medals won		
			Gold	Silver	Bronze
2001	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	188	135	79	87
2003	Hanoi, Vietnam	102	56	41	45
2005	Manila, Philippines	118	80	41	30
2008	Korat, Thailand	180	82	74	46
2009	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	258	94	81	71
2011	Solo, Indonesia	122	51	36	45
2014	Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar	150	50	49	41
2015	Singapore	191	52	58	37

medals when he won another bronze medal at the 1992 Paralympic Games. The number of Malaysian women in the Paralympic Games is less than their male counterparts. There were no women in the Malaysian Paralympic contingent in 1972, 1992 and 1996, and only one female Malaysian athlete in 1988. Siow Lee Chan is the



only Malaysian woman to win a Paralympic medal. She won a bronze medal in powerlifting at the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing.

The Far East and South Pacific Games for the Disabled, better known as the FESPIC Games, was a multi-sport and multi-disability competition in Asia and the South Pacific. It was first held in Oita, Japan in 1975. Malaysia first took part in the third edition of the FESPIC Games in 1982. Malaysian athletes competed in three disability categories, namely physical disability, visual impairment and cerebral palsy in the Games in Hong Kong. Since then, Malaysia has taken part in subsequent FESPIC Games which were held every four years. Malaysia has won medals in all the FESPIC Games that the country has taken part in. However, the best performance was at the 9th and last FESPIC Games in Kuala Lumpur, where Malaysia won 44 gold, 60 silver and 71 bronze medals. Table 4 shows Malaysia's participation in the FESPIC Games.

The FESPIC Games was replaced by the Asian Para Games. To continue the tradition of the FESPIC Games, the Asian Para Games in 2010 was called the 10th Asian Para Games. Table 5 shows Malaysia's participation in the Asian Para Games.

The ASEAN Para Games is a biennial multi-sport and multi-disability competition in South East Asia. Countries take turns to host the Games. The 1st ASEAN Para Games, held in Kuala Lumpur in 2001, had only two sports – athletics and swimming. The number of sports increased to 15 in the most recent Games in 2015. Malaysia has done well in the ASEAN Para Games. The country has been in the top three of the medal tally in all the competitions and topped it once in 2001. Table 6 shows Malaysia's participation in the ASEAN Para Games.

The Commonwealth Games is a multi-sport competition which involves athletes from Commonwealth nations. The Games, which started in 1930, are held every four years. Events for elite athletes with disabilities were included in exhibition events in 1994 and from 2002, the Commonwealth Games have integrated events for athletes with disabilities. Events for athletes with disabilities are part of the main competition schedule, and medals are counted as part of the overall medal tally. Malaysian athletes with disabilities have taken part in the Commonwealth Games and have won a total of one silver and four bronze medals. In 2002, Malaysia won one silver medal in athletics, two bronze medals in lawn bowls and one bronze medal in powerlifting. In 2014, Malaysia won a bronze medal in powerlifting.

## 7. Hosting international competitions

In addition to participating in international competitions, Malaysia has also played host to numerous international disability sport competitions. Among the single-sport competitions the country has hosted are the Invacare World Team Wheelchair Tennis Cup (1999), IPC World Powerlifting Championship (2002), 4th IPC World Bowls Championship (2004), 3rd Asia Pacific Archery Championship (2004), 1st Asian Paralympic Badminton Cup (2004), Asia and South Pacific Table Tennis Championship (2005), Asia Tenpin Bowling Championship (2005), Malaysian Open UNIQLO International Wheelchair Tennis Tour Championship (2015) and IPC Powerlifting World Cup (2016). Three multi-sports and multi-disability competitions that Malaysia has hosted are the ASEAN Para Games, FESPIC Games and Asian Youth Para Games.

Malaysia has hosted the ASEAN Para Games twice (2001 and 2009). The 1st ASEAN Para Games was held in Kuala Lumpur from 25 to 30 October 2001. The Games had events in athletics and swimming. A total of 548 athletes from the 10 ASEAN countries (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) participated in the Games. Malaysia succeeded in setting 11 new regional records in athletics. Kuala Lumpur again hosted the ASEAN Para Games in 2009 when Laos could not host it. Approximately 1,000 athletes from the 10 ASEAN countries and Timor Leste competed in 11 sports (athletics, badminton, bowling, chess, power-lifting, swimming, sailing, table tennis, volleyball, wheelchair basketball and wheelchair tennis). Malaysia will be hosting the ASEAN Para Games again in 2017.

The largest disability sport competition Malaysia hosted was the last FESPIC Games (25 November to 1 December 2006). Held in Kuala Lumpur, it was a record of sorts for the FESPIC Games. It had the most number of countries participating, the largest number of athletes and the most number of sports. About 4,000 athletes from 47 countries from Asia and Oceania took part in 19 sports. It was the first time that countries from West Asia took part. Over 2,000 medals were won during the Games. Athletes in the Games were truly world class. Twenty seven International Paralympic Committee (IPC) world records were broken in athletics, archery and powerlifting.

More than 60 new FESPIC Games records were set in athletics, archery, powerlifting and swimming.

Malaysia also hosted the Asian Youth Para Games from 26 to 30 October 2013. Over 1,200 athletes with disabilities aged between 15 to 19 years from 30 countries participated in 14 sports (archery, athletics, badminton, boccia, chess, goalball, judo, powerlifting, swimming, table tennis, tenpin bowling, sitting volleyball, wheelchair tennis and wheelchair basketball). Malaysia was fourth in the medal tally with 19 gold, 22 silver and 18 bronze medals.

## 8. Relationship with the International Paralympic Committee

Malaysia is an active member of the IPC and has hosted IPC events, for example the IPC Strategic Planning Congress in 2001, Asian Women in Paralympic Sport Leadership Summit in 2008 and the IPC General Assembly in 2009.

At the 2001 IPC Strategic Planning Congress, about 250 delegates from 75 countries discussed themes related to the governance, roles, responsibilities and structure of the IPC. It was agreed that the focus of the Paralympic Movement should be on sport and the role of Paralympic athletes within its governing structure should be strengthened.

The aim of the Asian Women in Paralympic Sport Leadership Summit was to empower women to be leaders in the Paralympic Movement. Over 60 participants from 19 countries attended the 2008 Summit, and contributed to a regional action plan to increase gender equity for girls and women in the Paralympic movement in Asia.

At the 2009 IPC General Assembly, approximately 350 participants from National Paralympic Committees, disability specific sport federations, International Federations, and various regions and sports were present. The Assembly ratified nine National Paralympic Committees as members and agreed to re-include athletes with intellectual disabilities in competitions, including the Paralympic Games.

## 9. International aid for disability sport

There has not been much international aid for disability sport in Malaysia. However, Japanese organisations, such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Japanese Chamber of Trade & Industry, Malaysia (JACTIM), have contributed. The aim of JICA is “to contribute to the promotion of international cooperation as well as the sound development of Japanese and global economy by supporting the socioeconomic development, recovery or economic stability of developing regions”. Projects funded by JICA include training Malaysian sports instructors in Japan as well as hiring coaches to work in Malaysia. JACTIM was established to promote economic relations between Malaysia and Japan. Funding from JACTIM has been used to buy equipment for disability sport.

## 10. Expectation for assistance from Japan for disability sport

In order to raise the standard of disability sport in Malaysia, there is a need to train more coaches. At present, there are no Malaysians who are internationally certified coaches. Coaching camps could be conducted in Malaysia so that more people can be trained. This is preferable to sending a few people overseas for training.

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## マレーシア連邦における 障がい者スポーツを取り巻く現状

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本稿は、マレーシアにおける障がい者スポーツの歴史を振り返り、発展および功績に関する実態の把握を目的とする。パラリンピック競技大会、アジアパラ競技大会、極東・南太平洋身体障害者スポーツ大会（FESPIC Games）、ASEAN パラ競技大会など総合スポーツ競技大会や総合障がい者スポーツ競技大会への参加をはじめとし、マレーシアの障がい者スポーツの歩みを1970年代から現在に至るまで辿る。さらに、マレーシアにおける障がい者スポーツ団体の役割について、政府と NGO が協力して障がい者スポーツの振興に取り組んでいる。政府は、障がい者スポーツ奨励のため、政策、施設および財政面での支援に力を入れている。障がい者スポーツの統括組織であるマレーシアパラリンピック協議会（Malaysia Paralympic Council）は、障がい者の活動的なライフスタイルの奨励に努め、新しいスポーツやレクリエーションプログラムの紹介に尽力している。そして、マレーシアはフェスピック競技大会、アジアパラユース競技大会、ASEAN パラ競技大会などの各競技大会とともに国際パラリンピック委員会の会議・会合等の主催国として、国際的な役割を果たしている。