

**Brief History of the SEA Games**  
by  
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**Background**

The Southeast Asian (SEA) Games Federation has 11 member NOCs, namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippine, Timor Leste, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam. The SEA Games Federation Region has a population of over 600 million and is amongst the fastest economic growth in the world.

The SEA Games was established in 1959 as the Southeast Asia Peninsular (SEAP) Games. with the following seven members: Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Burma (now known as Myanmar), Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam. The 1<sup>st</sup> SEAP Games was held in Bangkok in December 1959.

The SEA Games Charter has two important articles. The first is the rotation of host of the SEA Games by alphabetical order. If any host is not ready to host then the organisation of the SEA Games is passed to the next NOC. The second is that the President and Secretary General of the SEA Games Federation are from the Host NOC.

The above two very important articles have ensured the sustainability and longevity of the SEAP Games for the following reasons:

- Removed the politics and high expenses of bidding to host the SEAP Games
- Removed the elections of office bearers, which can lead to politics and also ensured that the office bearers have a tenure of only 2 years.
- Ensured the continuous transfer and sharing of knowledge, experience and technology from one host to the next and from one set of office bearers to the next.

The SEAP Games progressed successfully, until 1975, when due to the end of the war in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, there were only 4 participating NOCs at the 8<sup>th</sup> SEAP Games held in Bangkok in 1975. With only 4 NOCs participating in the SEAP Games, the SEAP Games was in danger as it would be too much of a burden for the 4 NOCs to organise the SEAP Games once every 8 years.

In 1977, it was Malaysia's turn to host the 9<sup>th</sup> SEAP Games. The NOC of Malaysia proposed that in order to strengthen the SEAP Games, it was imperative to increase the membership of the Federation from 7 to 10, by the inclusion of Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and Philippine, and changing its name from the Southeast Asia Peninsular Games (SEAP Games) to the Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games).

The proposal was approved and the 9<sup>th</sup> SEAP Games was changed to the 9<sup>th</sup> SEA Games, with 7 NOCs participating, namely Burma (now known as Myanmar), Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the three new NOCs of Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and Philippine. The 7<sup>th</sup> SEA Games was a great success.

The 10<sup>th</sup> SEA Games, 11<sup>th</sup> SEA Games and 12<sup>th</sup> SEA Games were organized in 1979, 1981 and 1983 by the NOCs of Indonesia, Philippine and Singapore, respectively. From the 1<sup>st</sup>

SEAP Games held in 1959 to the 13<sup>th</sup> SEA Games held in 1985, there was a rule that the maximum number of sports to be competed in the SEAP Games shall be 18 only.

The 13<sup>th</sup> SEA Games was held in Bangkok in 1985 with 18 sports. That was the last time the Games had a maximum ceiling on the number of sports to be included in the programme of a SEA Games. The Host of the 14<sup>th</sup> SEA Games in 1987 was Indonesia and the NOC of Indonesia managed to persuade the SEA Games Federation to amend its Charter on the maximum number of sports in the SEA Games programme from 18 sports to unlimited. This opened the flood gates and no in-depth study has been carried out on whether this amendment has benefitted the SEA Games and the NOCs.

Democratic Kampuchea returned to the SEA Games in 1983 in Singapore and participated in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> SEA Games in Bangkok and Jakarta.

In 1989, when Malaysia hosted the 15<sup>th</sup> SEA Games, Laos and Vietnam returned to participate while Democratic Kampuchea did not participate, because it was suspended by the IOC. Thus for the first time in the history of the SEA Games there were 9 NOCs.

In 1995, the NOC of Cambodia was recognized by the IOC and returned to the fold of the SEA Games Federation and participated in the 18<sup>th</sup> SEA Games held in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The NOC of Timor Leste was recognized by the IOC in 2003 and participated in the Vietnam 22<sup>nd</sup> SEA Games as the 11<sup>th</sup> member of the SEA Games Federation.

Up to 1997, only 6 of the 11 NOC of the SEA Games Federation had hosted the SEA Games. In 1999, Brunei Darussalam hosted a very successful 20<sup>th</sup> SEA Games in Bandar Seri Begawan. Vietnam NOC became the 8<sup>th</sup> NOC to host the SEA Games, when they hosted the 22<sup>nd</sup> SEA Games in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in 2003. The Laos NOC was the next to host the SEA for the first time, which was the 25<sup>th</sup> SEA Games in 2009. Today, 9 of the 11 NOCs of the SEA Games Federation have hosted the SEA Games. Cambodia NOC has confirmed to be the host of the 32<sup>nd</sup> SEA Games in 2023, leaving the NOC Timor Leste to host the SEA Games sometime later.

### **Sports and Events**

At the inaugural Games in 1959, six participating countries, Burma (now known as Myanmar), Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam, competed in 12 sports, namely Athletics, Badminton, Basketball, Boxing, Cycling, Football, Lawn Tennis, Swimming, Shooting, Table Tennis, Volleyball and Weightlifting with a total of 145 events, There were 653 athletes and officials. Thailand finished in first position with Vietnam second.

In 1985, when the maximum number of sports in the programme was 18, the NOC of Thailand organized 18 sports with 250 events. After the SEA Games Federation Charter, the amendment to delete the limit on the number of sports in the SEA Games programme, the host NOC, Indonesia increased the number of sports from 18 to 32 with 376 events. Since then, except for the 20<sup>th</sup> SEA Games in 1999 and the 25<sup>th</sup> SEA Games in 2009, hosted by the NOC of Brunei Darussalam and the NOC of Laos, all the other SEA Games have over 30 sports and 350 events.

The most number of sports and events in the SEA Games was at the 26<sup>th</sup> SEA Games held in Palembang and Jakarta in 2011, with 43 sports and 554 events. The smallest SEA Games in recent years was the 20<sup>th</sup> SEA Games held in Brunei Darussalam in 1999, with 21 sports and 290 events.