

By VIJENTHI NAIR

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THOSE who actively participated in organised runs before the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in nearly everything grinding to a halt, have been taking solace from virtual events since public events that draw large crowds are prohibited by the movement control order.

Virtual running events are similar to conventional ones but minus the grandeur and on-site excitement associated with the event day.

There is no start or finishing line; rather, participants are given a stipulated number of days to complete the distance they signed up for, from anywhere.

Participants are required to submit a report on their run to the organiser before the race's end date.

A string of virtual runs have been organised in the last couple of months, including one of the biggest running events in Malaysia — the Kuala Lumpur Standard Chartered Marathon (KLSCM).

Its project director Rainer Biemans said a total of 52,363 people registered for the virtual event that took place from Dec 5 to 13 last year, an increase of more than 7,000 participants in comparison to 45,000 participants which was the maximum limit in the previous years.

However, only 35,000 participants completed the race, he said.

"Nevertheless, it was still a substantial number for a virtual event.

"Participation was free this time around, so that might have contributed to the high number of registration.

"We still had the same categories as in the previous years, which were 5km, 10km, 21.1km and 42.2km.

"Participants were required to run at one go, in the outdoors, and submit evidence of their run.

"The difference this time around was that the runners' times were instantly updated on the leaderboard, setting a target for the later runners to beat.

"The competitive spirit was very much alive," Biemans added.

The Putrajaya 100 Miles organiser, The Comrades All Star director Suzie Widyawati Ganis said response for their virtual edition this year was better than the previous years.



Soh doing his 10km in Shah Alam for the KLSCM virtual run last year.

Runs take to digital platform

Enthusiasts continue to keep active and improve personal times via virtual events

"We usually have three categories, which are 50km, 100km and 160km that will have between 500 and 600 participants.

But this year, we had 762 participants despite only offering the 50km category," she said, adding that the run planned for 2020 had to be cancelled.

While the organisers were pleased with the overwhelming response, Suzie said some runners were suspected of being dishonest about their run.

"Fair play is important in sports. Unfortunately, there were suspicions that some runners were sharing reports and cheating.

"We found that a few reports had identical routes and time, and there were also some with impossible timing, such as completing 50km in just over three hours.

"We had people who could not finish the race but submitted their reports anyway, and that was okay.

"Our objective is to encourage a

healthy lifestyle, so I hope all runners will take pride in their own achievement and run honestly with a competitive spirit," she said.

For running club Running Kaki Malaysia, which has been organising the annual 25km Christmas Run since 2016, their event last year was not the first time that it had been held virtually.

Club founder Tan Mei Kee said their inaugural Christmas Run was a virtual one, followed by three consecutive years of the run being held on location in Kuala Lumpur.

To continue the tradition of having the Christmas run, Tan said they went back to having the run virtually, which saw 583 participants consisting of members and non-members.

"The club is more suited for beginners in the running scene.

"Our objective is to encourage more people to start running and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

"So, having the event in a virtual

format does not alter our objective.

"In fact, it affirms our mission that staying active can be done from anywhere," she said.

Runners don't stop

Tower runner Soh Wai Ching, 27, was one of the many who joined the KLSCM virtual run to remain competitive in the sport.

He said that he had been taking part in the men's 10km open category for the last nine years and wanted to continue competing with other competitive runners for the best time.

Soh, who is Malaysia Towerrunning Association president, came in third in the most recent race with a time of 35.51 minutes.

"I clocked 33.37 minutes in 2018 and placed second overall, behind a Kenyan participant.

"In 2019, I finally achieved my goal to be the overall champion