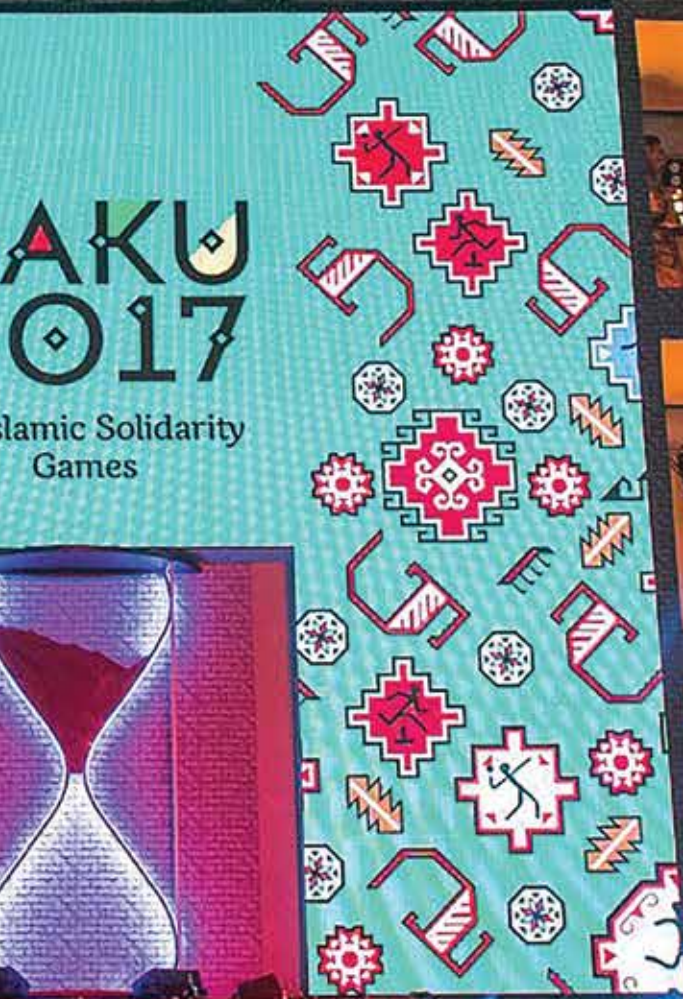




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# SPORTS - WORLD - ISLAM...







Azerbaijan has started the countdown to the 4<sup>th</sup> Islamic Solidarity Games to be held in Baku on 12-22 May 2017. Targeted preparations have already got under way. Note that the Games are expected to bring together more than five thousand athletes from 50 countries.

The decision to hold the Islamic Games in Azerbaijan was adopted in 2013 at the congress of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation (ISSF) in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia). But **the forthcoming competition will not only be a great event in the life of the Islamic world. It will be yet another manifestation of Azerbaijan's multicultural status** – a country that hosts major sporting events of both Europe and the Muslim East with equal success.

The logo and brand of the Games have already been presented to the public. The design of the logo, which symbolizes the history and culture of Islam, was developed by the Azerbaijani company McCann Baku. In the brand, the leading motif is the carpet, which is so close to all the Muslim East, including Azerbaijan.

The Baku-2017 program will be fairly extensive and includes athletics, para-athletics, diving, swimming, water polo, streetball (basketball in 3x3 format), football, rhythmic gymnastics, sports gymnastics, martial arts, table tennis, handball, judo, para-judo, Greco-Roman wrestling, freestyle wrestling, shooting, tennis, volleyball, boxing, zorkhana, karate, taekwondo and weightlifting. The chairman of the Coordinating Council, Vice-President of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation Colonel Hamad Kalkaba Malboum, said that preparations for the Games are taking place at the highest level and there is no doubt that the competition will meet all accepted standards. "Baku is the right choice. We became convinced of that once again. We had a lot of fruitful and interesting meetings. The organizing committee, headed by the First Lady of Azerbaijan Mehriban Aliyeva, did a great job, and we

witnessed great coordinating activity by all the organizations while preparing for such a big event. I am confident that competitions in Baku will be cited as an example to other countries that will host the Islamic Games in the future. I believe that a grand sports festival will be held here, and we will all become participants in it," Malboum said.

The presentation of the Islamic Games took place as part of the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, which once again underlines the high status of the upcoming Games in Baku. The presentation was attended by more than sixty guests, including the Vice-President of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation, Malboum, and heads of government and National Olympic Committees of a number of Muslim countries. The guests watched a film about the Games-2017 and were provided with comprehensive information about the preparations for the competitions, sports arenas and so on. The organizers responded to the question about the accreditation process, accommodation for athletes, sports complexes and so on. Participants in the presentation were able to make sure once again that the work is going according to plan.

The First Islamic Games were held in Saudi Arabia in 2005. The capital of Azerbaijan is taking the baton from Indonesian Palembang, which hosted the Games in 2013. As already noted, for Azerbaijan it is the second major international sporting event after the European Games of 2015, and the experience of the latter will automatically spread to the Islamic Solidarity Games. In particular, the arenas where the European Games were held will be used, although some events will take place at other sports facilities such as Bakcell Arena and Dalga Arena stadiums, the tennis academy and the Sarhadchi sports complex. It is planned to involve about eight thousand volunteers, including those who have experience in the European Games.

At the first meeting of the Organizing Committee of the

4<sup>th</sup> Islamic Solidarity Games, President Ilham Aliyev stressed that Azerbaijan is part of the Islamic world and will make every effort for the success of the Islamic Games.

If we talk about the purely sporting aspect of the topic, at the last Games in Palembang the Azerbaijani team won 24 medals - 6 gold, 9 silver and 9 bronze medals. Of course, the home team status is obliging, and, Azerbaijan will try to excel in the overall standings. Some federations in various sports have conducted workshops on preparations for the Games and the prospects of teams. We can already predict a bitter struggle, especially as representatives of the Islamic world set the pace in a number of disciplines in the international arena. For example, Iran is very strong in taekwondo and won the World Cup in the overall standings. In addition, great attention will probably be drawn to the football tournament, which will be held with the participation of eight teams.

A distinctive feature of the Islamic Games 2017 will be that competitions among Paralympians will be held in some sports. This practice has already been applied in the European Games when Paralympians attended a judo competition in individual standings. The same is planned at the forthcoming Islamic Games - in judo and athletics.



The participation of Paralympians should give the Games a certain social status, which is why the Islamic Games will gain even more.

Along with this, the karate tournament arouses an increased interest among specialists and a wide range of fans. As you know, at a recent session of the International Olympic Committee in Rio this sport was included in the Summer Olympics and will debut in that capacity in Tokyo after four years. So for many teams, the Islamic Games in Baku will become an important step in preparations for the Olympics.







The undoubted highlight of the Baku-2017 will be the zorkhana competition, which is quite popular in the Middle East. Zorkhana is the common name for urban sports clubs of wrestlers common since the Middle Ages. World championships are held in this sport, and the Islamic Games 2017 are likely to open a new page in its international popularization. Note that the zorkhana tournament will be held at the Crystal Hall – an arena built for the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest.

The solemn opening and closing ceremonies of the Games, just like during the European Games, will take place at the new Olympic Stadium in Baku. The organizers are preparing interesting surprises for these ceremonies, which should make a vivid impression on the participants and spectators. Participants in the Islamic Games will be put up in the same place as participants in last year's European Games - in the Village of Athletes near the Olympic Stadium.

It should be noted that the upcoming Islamic Games in Baku will not only be a purely sporting event, but also a kind of cultural festival. There are proposals that, during the competition, states participating in the Games should open stands, which will act as some kind of cul-

tural exhibition. There is also the idea of building on the Baku Boulevard a stage where a concert of one of the participating countries will be held every day. In short, there are a number of interesting ideas that are sure to come true.

Whatever it is, there is no doubt that these Games, like last year's Games, will attract thousands of sports fans from different countries. And it is already clear that their impressions from the visit to the capital of Azerbaijan will not yield to purely sporting ones and will remain in their memory for a lifetime. Ultimately, the 4<sup>th</sup> Islamic Solidarity Games will be an important part of the international sporting calendar and at the same time, the most important event in the social life of Azerbaijan.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Islamic Solidarity Games will be not only a great event in the life of the Islamic world. They will be yet another manifestation of Azerbaijan's multicultural status – a country that hosts major sporting events of both Europe and the Muslim East with equal success. The Games will be the most important event of public life in Azerbaijan. 🌟





**BAKU 2017** 4th Islamic Solidarity Games

**Zurkhaneh**

