

'Ping-Pong diplomacy' returns

By LAN TIAN

About 60 foreign diplomats contested a ping pong competition organized by the embassy of the Maldives in China last Saturday at Beijing Gymnasium with some 25 embassies, including Albania, Bangladesh, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Tunisia and the United States, taking part.

"It was the first time we have organized a table tennis tournament among diplomats, and I am very delighted to see so many diplomats including some ambassadors participating," Maldives ambassador to China Ahmed Latheef told China Daily. "The event is aimed at promoting friendship and cooperation among diplomats and their families in Beijing through sports, and to embrace the Olympic spirit by celebrating the 50-day countdown to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

"Irrespective of the level of play, everyone enjoyed it tremendously, which is the most important thing. With such a good response this time, we are encouraged to organize a similar event next year as well," he said.

Latheef, who represented the Maldives in table tennis in 1973 at the AAA Friendship Invitational Tournament and in 1990 at the Beijing Asian Games,

said he has no doubt the Beijing Olympic Games will be a huge success.

The "Diplomats' Table Tennis Tournament: Rally for Friendship and Harmony" was organized in partnership with the Chinese Table Tennis Association and China World Peace Foundation.

"I participated in the tournament because I love sports and want to make some contribution to the Beijing Olympic Games," German ambassador Michael Schaefer said after losing a match to his opponent, Polish counselor and former secretary general of the Polish Olympic Committee Janusz Tastera.

The tournament included team matches and individual singles matches for men and women, as well as a friendly match between China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs team and one made up of foreign diplomats.

Lim Juay Jin, minister counselor of the Malaysian embassy, compared the diplomats' table tennis tournament to the "ping-pong diplomacy" of the American table tennis players, whose 1971 China visit opened the door to China-US exchanges.

"I think this tournament is a continuation of the famous ping-pong diplomacy in the 1970s. Organizing such an event is very meaningful, especially now in the 2008 Beijing Olympic year," Lim said.