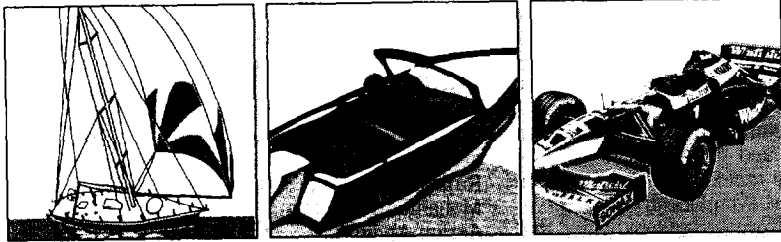


Aim for excellence

STAR 21 SEP 2002

Whopping RM227.5m from government to improve sports



PETALING JAYA: The Government, in a bid to promote new activities and to help athletes pursue excellence in sports, among them motor-racing, speed boat racing and yachting, has allocated a whopping RM227.5 million to the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who presented the Budget to Parliament yesterday, said the Government would continue to expand and encourage sports activities not just as an effort to cultivate a healthy lifestyle but also to attract more international sports enthusiasts to participate in the nation's sports activities.

Dr Mahathir said that he was proud of the success achieved by the Malaysian contingent in the Commonwealth Games in Manchester last month. Malaysia won seven gold medals.

"Even though we are still able to perform well in some sports, we lag behind in others. The nation had one time attained glory in football and was well known in the Asian region, even defeating the Japanese and South Korean

teams, who have now emerged as world class giants. What happened to our players," he asked?

Dr Mahathir urged all parties, especially the sports associations to make a diagnosis and undertake urgent measures to overcome existing weaknesses rather than indulge in internal squabbles.

"We must be more confident and toughen our spirits to regain the glory of national sports. Treat the forthcoming Asian Games in Busan as a challenge to prove that we have the capability to attain great success. As for the national contingent, prove that Malaysia Boleh," he said.

Sepang International Circuit (SIC) general manager Ahmad Mustafa welcomed the encouraging plans of the government to further promote motor sports.

"It is a big boost to motor sport. Formula One is a high technology sport. There is no doubt it helps to promote

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Dell: Timely call by PM to stop rot in football

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tourism, as well. It is a good investment because it creates more funds to benefit the two sectors - the transfer of technology and tourism," said Ahmad Mustafa.

Last month, Malaysia hosted the Formula 1 Powerboat Championships at the Mines Resort City, which attracted top drivers from 18 countries.

The FA of Malaysia's (FAM) secretary general, Datuk Dell Akbar Khan, said that it was a timely call made by the Prime Minister to check the rot of the national football team, which he said had failed to shine in the international arena even though millions of ringgit had been spent on them over the years.

"We don't deny that the standard is low. We have played our part and are still looking at avenues to improve the standard of the national team," said Dell, who said that the blame should be equally shared by the players for their failure to advance even though they had

top facilities at their disposal.

The national team in their football history had failed to get past the qualifying rounds of the World Cup and have managed only to qualify for the Olympics twice (1972 Munich, 1980 Moscow). In the Asian Games, they were bronze medallists twice - Jakarta 1962 and Teheran 1974. In the regional SEA Games, Malaysia last won the gold medal in 1989.

Dell said that it would take an integrated effort, mainly by four important components, to achieve success for the national team. The four components, he said, were the roles of the FAM, the coaches, managers and players.

"The FAM have carried out a wide scope of development programmes, bringing professionalism into the game, engaging top foreign coaches, sending players overseas and even having brought world class opposition like Brazil to play in Malaysia," said Dell.

"The onus is on the players to change. They have to wake up," said Dell.