

■ National excellence: Government committed to developing sports

PM: Stop squabbling!

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, while assuring that the Government will continue to expand and encourage sports, wants associations to put an end to internal bickering and focus on improving standards.

Dr Mahathir said the emphasis of associations, if regaining lost glory was the aim, should be to overcome weaknesses rather than indulge in internal squabbles.

The Prime Minister, citing soccer as an example, said while Malaysia was still able to perform well in some sports, it lagged behind in others.

"The nation had at 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 football giants.

"What happened to our players?" asked Dr Mahathir when presenting the 2003 budget in Parliament yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said while the Government was proud of the success achieved in the Manchester Commonwealth Games, where Malaysia won seven gold medals, more had to be done.

"The Government urges all parties, especially the sports associations, to make a diagnosis and undertake urgent measures to overcome existing weaknesses rather than indulge in internal squabbles."

A classic example of an association that allowed internal squabbling to derail development was the Malay-Sian AAU.

This led to the Sports Commissioner suspending MAAU under the Sports Development Act. However, the athletics body, with a new set of office bearers, is back on track.

The Prime Minister said all the concerned parties had to be more confident to regain the glory of national sports.

"Treat the forthcoming 14th Asian Games in Busan as a challenge to prove that we have the capability to attain greater success. As for the national contingent, prove that *"Malaysia Boleh."*

Dr Mahathir said the Government was committed to developing sports.

"The Government will continue to expand and encourage sports programmes and 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.

"Among the new activities being promoted are extreme and motor sports, speed boat race and yachting."

To ensure the success of these programmes, Dr Mahathir said a sum of RM227.5 million will be allocated to the Sports Ministry.

Furthermore, the 'Rakan Muda' programme will be enhanced with a new approach to increase its effectiveness and participation of youths.

A sum of RM12.3 million has been allocated for the programme next year, said the Prime Minister.

But the message from Dr Mahathir was very clear.

The national vision is attaining excellence at the Asian and world stages and there is no room for squabbling and jostling for power.