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Dr Mahathir concerned, wants soccer 'cured'

BELIEVE it or not, this time it was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who had expressed his concern about the status of Malaysian soccer on the world stage.

In last week's Cabinet meeting, he had asked Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein on what the Government could do to help project the sport in the world arena.

"We were discussing Malaysia's chances in the Commonwealth Games in that Cabinet meeting, when the Prime Minister spoke about soccer, and why we couldn't attain world recognition.

"The Prime Minister had also asked me to see what my ministry could do to help soccer attain recognition at the world level, like South Korea and Japan had done in the recent World Cup," said Hishammuddin.

Dr Mahathir, who is bent on seeing Malaysia attain the developed nation status in his 2020 vision, would also like to see sport in sync with that vision.

Following his call, Hishammuddin said that he has identified soccer as one of the three sports his ministry will push for world class status.

Apart from soccer, he has also identified motorsports as an area where Malaysians can excel in and gain world recognition.

"I haven't made up my mind yet on what the third sport would be, but I am looking at the prospects of golf or tennis as the sport to get us there.

"Golf and tennis are high-profile sports in the world arena and they are played all year round, to huge television audiences," said Hishammuddin.

Apart from the international glare, Hishammuddin is also looking at the monetary pull of these sports.

"To be able to get the young ones in, we have to first get the support of parents. And if we can convince them that these sports will provide their children with financial security and independence, we'll be there."

But to attain such levels, Hishammuddin said that mindsets must change. To attain world status in sport, Malaysians must come out of their comfort zones.

The same call has been made by the Prime Minister this last decade in his quest for the developed nation status.

Coming back to soccer, Hishammuddin said he will be sitting with the top brass of the FA of Malaysia to discuss ways on how Malaysia can achieve world recognition.

Currently Malaysia are ranked 111 in the world.

On motorsports, Hishammuddin would like to see more Malaysians in Formula One.

"After the World Cup, Formula One is the most followed sport. And the World Cup comes only once in four years.

"As I want to see motorsports develop further, and with no leadership in this fraternity, I will now personally chart the course of this sport," he said.

"But like I said, we have to change our mindsets, we must step out of the proverbial coconut shell, and push ourselves out of this mediocre state that we seem to be so content with now."