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SRAM wants States to buck up

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THE flow of talented players has been reduced to a trickle and SRA of Malaysia (SRAM) president Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir wants the inactive States to buck up and play a more pronounced role in development.

In fact, a worried Mokhzani said yesterday that this will be one of the main topics on the agenda at SRAM's Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Dec 22.

Also to be discussed will be the association's five-year plan, targets, and the 2003 calendar.

"There is going to be a revamp in SRAM, several States are inactive and we need them to play a more active role," said Mokhzani after presenting the "Jalur Gemilang" to the national junior team bound for the world championships in Chennai, India.

"I have seen several new faces in the States, new chairmen of committees, and hope to get some ideas to get on a new footing. I am open to suggestions, and I want to hear from them."

SRAM's initial focus on development since 1985 was a success as there was a steady flow of talented juniors graduating to the national team.

Ong Beng Hee set the stage by winning the world junior title in Princeton, New Jersey in 1998 and is currently ranked world No 7. Three-time Asian champion Nicol David was the undisputed number one in her junior days.

Nicol was the only junior player to win the world junior title twice, which was achieved in Antwerp in 1999 and in Penang last year.

Among the players who came through the development programme are Kenneth Low, Azlan Iskandar, Ricky Lee, Michael Soo while the women's team was once strengthened by Sandra Wu, Leong Siu Lynn, Kuan Choy Lin, Daphine Ting and Chow Chooi Yeen.

At the moment, only Ong and Azlan are full-time professionals while Low is likely turn to coaching next year.

The women's squad is built around Nicol, Sharon Wee and Tricia Chuah while the juniors are lagging far behind in terms of skills and experience.

Mokhzani chose not to name the inactive States, but said he wanted the dormant affiliates to step up on their activities and tournaments.

"There are States like Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Sarawak who are active, who have their programmes running. I am not going to single out the inactive States, but we would like to see more tournaments being played around the country."

"I made a suggestion to rotate the venues of the committee meetings to different States each month. This is to encourage more interaction between States and a chance for them to air their views and grouses."

On whether there will be a move to get new committee members in inactive States, he said this is not the issue.

"Whether or not the States decide to pick new faces for their committees is up to them, what we want is for them to contribute. We want to go in and help the other States that are not as active as Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Sarawak. For example, Johor is a big State, and we would like to see more from them."

Mokhzani said SRAM needs to move and progress at a faster rate, acquire more sponsors, and to achieve that, the inactive States need to play their part.

"We need to move and progress at a faster rate and we are hoping to get more sponsors. More importantly, we would like to see more tournaments being played and input from the States."

Development has only been effective in Penang, Perak, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur while Sarawak and Sabah are beginning to show improvement.

Terengganu and Kelantan have also been producing notable juniors in the last two years but this was achieved purely through individual efforts.

The rest of the States have been lacking in development despite the National Sports Council's (NSC) monthly allocations channelled through the respective State sports councils.

SRAM is also in the midst of setting up regional academies in Pahang, Kuching, Kedah and Johor to beef up development.

The Penang SRA's academy, thanks to the State Government and Mulpha International's help, has already started.