

27/12/2002

Fostering unity through sport

Jugjet Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Sports and Youth Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein strongly believes that sports is a powerful medium which can foster racial integration in schools, and has drawn plans to "convert" school systems that have been hijacked.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed said yesterday the lack of integration in national schools had resulted in practices that emphasised form over substance.

The Prime Minister also lamented that as a result, more importance was placed on the banning of shorts and skirts than the desire to see people of all races study together.

"I strongly believe that wearing long pants during Physical Education and while taking part in school sports does not make a person 'more Islam' than those who do not. Even athletes from the Middle East wear shorts when playing soccer, so I see no justice in depriving schoolchildren of wearing shorts during sports," said Hishammuddin in Kuala Lumpur.

"And with the close relationship that we have with the Education Ministry (sports section) I plan to address the issue next year. The Sports Ministry and the Education Ministry have had several meetings in the last few months and have come out with plans to utilise sports as a tool to foster racial integration like in the 1970s and 1980s."

A working relationship between the two ministries was fostered on Nov 2, 1987 and in 2000, a meeting between the two ministries was held to, among others, find ways to bind the various races under one roof.

"I strongly believe that via sports, patriotism and the love for the country can be strengthened so that national integration will be achieved in the near future.

"The Tunas Cemerlang and Bakat Khas programmes came out of the meeting and it was also agreed that the Education Ministry will allocate enough time for all students to take part in PE and also develop and implement inter-racial programmes."

The joint committee entrusted to formulate plans to take sports in schools to a higher level has suggested five programmes namely:

- * To develop a bigger base for selection;
- * To cater for institutions of higher learning and students who have left the schooling system;
- * To develop high-achieving sports to be implemented by the National Sports Council;
- * To build more sporting facilities under the Education Ministry; and
- * Development of a sports programme under the NSC and the Education Ministry.

"The committee divided and implemented the above tasks and next year, we will go into top gear so that when the present batch of medal winners retire, there will be enough youth to fill the vacuum," he said.

The Education Ministry has built six new teacher training colleges which offer PE courses and by 2004, about 2,800 teachers with PE credentials will graduate.

"The Education Ministry, with an overall budget of RM142 million until 2010, has projected that about 5,800 teachers with strong PE backgrounds will be available to realise the dream of making Malaysia a sporting nation. The plan is, by 2010, every Secondary School will have two full-time sports teachers, while Primary Schools will have one."

The Education Ministry has identified 15 schools as "Project Schools" and next year, plans are afoot to have a such schools in every district.

"The existing two sports schools (Bukit Jalil and Bandar Penawar) have served their purpose well but enrolment is limited so the Education Ministry will build two more sports schools, in Perlis and Pahang, so that a bigger base will be available for national selection," said Hishammuddin.

He added that building new school blocks on existing fields would no longer be tolerated as gazetted in a directive to all schools.

"Right now, if a school lacks classrooms, the playing field is sacrificed but that practice is now history because we have an understanding with the Education Ministry that under no circumstances must fields be encroached upon.

"And for all new schools, the Education Ministry's stand is that it must have a soccer pitch, a 400m running track, and courts for tennis, badminton, sepak takraw, volleyball, netball, and basketball."