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FAM is listening to Prime Minister's call for improved standards

THE Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) yesterday thanked Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for showing interest in the progress of the sport.

Its vice-president Datuk Raja Ahmad Zainuddin Raja Omar said the association will take heed of the Prime Minister's concern in the declining standard of the game.

"FAM is doing everything possible to catch up with the other soccer powers in Asia," he said in Ijok yesterday.

When announcing the budget for 2003 on Friday, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia, who were once on par with South Korea and Japan, had been left lagging far behind by these teams who have attained world standards.

But Raja Ahmad appealed to the critics to be patient.

"FAM is moving in the right direction. We are in the process of moulding the under-23 team into a formidable squad," he said.

Raja Ahmad said the team, if given proper international exposure, will be fully matured within five or six years.

"Our first test will come in the Asian Games," he said.

"The next test will come in the Tiger Cup in Singapore and the Sea Games in Vietnam."

Meanwhile, Raja Ahmad said States and other affiliates must also play their roles in order for the game to flourish.

"The affiliates must not only aim to win local tournaments but also do their part in helping the game to progress," he said.