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Hishammuddin to put athletes on track

Zakri Baharudin

SPORTS Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein has received the Government's mandate to resolve all issues relating to the Malaysian Amateur Athletics Union (MAAU), which has been suspended by the Sports Commissioner since March 1.

Speaking after his post-Cabinet meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, Hishammuddin said: "I've asked the Cabinet to give me the power and a full mandate to handle the matter of the MAAU, and the Cabinet, which was chaired by the Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad), has agreed.

"With the full backing of the Cabinet, I hope to do whatever is necessary to put athletics back on track without fear or favour.

"I plan to take personal initiatives to ensure that the suspension issue will be resolved most efficiently and as fast as possible.

"I've been given the mandate, so I plan to do all that is necessary, but how long I take will depend on whether I can get the fullest cooperation of all the parties involved."

The Sports Commissioner, who is the Sport Ministry's chief-secretary Datuk Zabri Min, is empowered to suspend or deregister an association under section 20 of the Sports Development Act 1997.

By getting the Government's mandate, Hishammuddin, who plans to meet members of the MAAU after their Annual General Meeting on Tuesday before deciding on their appeal and their future, has in effect taken over such duties from his chief-secretary.

Fathul Razi Bakri, who is the Ministry's deputy director-general, has been appointed as MAAU's temporary administrator.

Presently, the MAAU, who were suspended by the Sports Commissioner last week, are appealing against the decision.

Commenting on the appeal, Hishammuddin said: "If the appeal is about matters which have already been raised, then that is not the process to take because this is not the time to point fingers and to raise petty issues.

"And neither are we looking to put the blame on anyone, and nobody needs to resign.

"But I hope to seek the cooperation of all those involved so that we can plan athletics properly because we need to do this before our athletes are able to compete at the highest level."

On the issue of Malaysian athletes not being able to train in Australia, Hishammuddin said: "That assumption by Australian Athletics that MAAU has been banned by the IAAF is wrong.

"There is no confirmation of this from IAAF, and the fact is, the programme has been approved by MAAU and NSC (the National Sports Council).

"Our plan is to give priority to the athletes and to make sure that their positions are not jeopardised.

"Also, Australia is actually a programme for exposure, not a target meet, so it will not affect us too much."

Hishammuddin also said that State affiliates should continue with their respective programmes as there are no restraints on such activities by the suspension order.

"We have appointed Encik Fathul Razi as MAAU's administrator, so there is already a proper administrative channel for activities to run," he added.

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