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Parliament-Football

ONG UNVEILS FIVE CAUSES FOR SLIDE IN M'SIAN FOOTBALL TEAM'S QUALITY

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 1 (Bernama) -- The Youth and Sports Ministry today unveiled five main causes for the dismal performance of Malaysia's national football team, especially when meeting foreign teams at international tournaments.

The ban on more than 100 players from playing for their state teams after they were suspected to be involved in match-fixing in the Premier League in 1994 and in 1995 was the cause for the decline, said its Deputy Minister Datuk Ong Tee Keat.

"Since the ban, there has been quite a big vacuum and it takes time to fill the gap and groom calibre players," he told Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor (BN-Tampin) during question time at the Dewan Rakyat today.

Ong also said lack of exposure and participation at international level also contributed to the dwindling standard of the sports which was most popular among the people.

"It's because Malaysia's team is not strong, not many credible teams invited the national squad to play matches with them," he said.

Ong also said the waning support from local spectators for the Malaysian League had led the state teams to face financial problems and this had taken a toll on efforts to improve training and preparation of players.

The real approach as professional footballers could not be observed by the players besides the absence of import players had made them less motivated to improve their skills, he said.

The Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) had, however, allowed the hiring of import players since this season.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had touched on the slide in quality of the country's national team when tabling the 2003 Budget in Parliament on Sept 20.

He had said Malaysia was at one time on par with South Korea and Japan but now it had lagged behind.

The national team taking part in the ongoing Busan Asian Games in South Korea lost 0-1 to Oman on Friday before beating Maldives 3-1 yesterday. Malaysia will meet hosts South Korea tomorrow.

Ong said the ministry was aware of the reality that the country's football standard was not up to the mark and hoped FAM, sponsors and local fans would give their full commitment to change the scenario.

Apart from allowing foreign signing, FAM was offering lucrative rewards to teams qualifying to the finals as an incentive to players to play a quality game, he said.

He said FAM would cooperate with the Malaysian Schools Sports Council (MSSM) and National Sports Council (NSC) to set up 111 centres of excellence nationwide to unravel young talents in football.

Efforts to place young players at the Sports School in Bukit Jalil had shown results when the Malaysian team won the Lion City Cup in Singapore last year and encouraging performance at the Al-Wahda Invitational Championship in the United Arab Emirates early this year.

Ong said FAM also sought assistance from international football experts through the International Football Federation (FIFA) and International Olympic Council to help improve quality of local coaches.

Replying to a supplementary question from Abdul Fatah Harun (PAS-Rantau Panjang) on foreign players joining state teams, he said the performance of

the teams did not 100 per cent depended on the talents of foreign signings.  
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