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AFC urges OCM to send soccer team to Busan

THE Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has strongly recommended to the Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM) that the Malaysian soccer team be allowed to compete in the Busan Asian Games.

AFC secretary general Datuk Peter Velappan, in making the recommendation, reiterated the fact that National Olympic Committees need to be sensitive to the development efforts at both the national and continental levels.

"There has been concern expressed by no less than the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, on the poor state of Malaysian football," said Velappan.

"The AFC has a football development pyramid which starts with a foundation in the age-groups of eight onwards. Then, we have competitions for the under-14s, under-17s and under-20s," he added.

"The next stage is of course the under-23 tournament and for this reason we have been able to convince the Olympic Council of Asia to accept the under-23 age-group to be contested in the Asian Games.

It is the only group that does not enjoy many international matches," said Velappan.

"It is surprising that while the Olympic Council of Asia has embraced our efforts to promote and develop football on the continent, we still have some National Olympic Committees who do not share this vision of greater glory for national and Asian football."

In a letter to OCM secretary Datuk Sieh Kok Chi, Velappan urged the OCM to fully support the participation of the Malaysian under-23 side in the Asian Games.

Velappan said he certain that matches involving Malaysia will be a major attraction. The Koreans have not forgotten that Malaysia beat Korea to a berth for the 1972 Munich Olympics.

"For this and the other reasons of development, I would strongly urge the OCM to send the Malaysian team to Busan," added Velappan.

Malaysia is in Group A with Korea, Oman and Maldives. OCM is to make a decision on Aug 15.