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Dr M: Firms should help youths

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LANGKAWI, Tues. - Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad urged companies to initiate programmes to develop youths as a way of serving the community.

Programmes such as nurturing new sports talent or helping youths in their studies would develop goodwill between businesses and local communities, he said while praising the Emkay Group of Companies Excellence in Sports programme which he launched today at the company's Kuala Melaka driving range in Padang Mat Sirat, here.

"It's a very good programme because they teach children to be good in sports and their studies at the same time," Dr Mahathir said. "It's no use if you are good at sports but stupid, or if you are just good in your studies but inactive."

Present were Dr Mahathir's wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and Emkay Group of Companies executive chairman Tan Sri Mustapha Kamal Abu Bakar.

The programme, which marries academic performance with athletic activity, was first launched in Taiping in 2001, aimed at exposing rural children to golf, tennis and swimming.

At today's launch, 10 pupils, aged between seven and nine, were chosen from four schools in Padang Mat Sirat to undergo training in tennis, bringing the number of pupils in the Kuala Melaka programme to 42. The first batch of 32 trainees started their golf training on Jan 24. The driving range is a small part of the Kuala Melaka river park started by the Langkawi Development Authority.

The pupils are recommended for the programme by the Langkawi District Education Department.

The park consists of community halls and stages where the company holds concerts and cultural shows during the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition.

"Like our programme in Taiping, it is our way of giving back and saying thanks to Dr Mahathir," Mustapha Kamal said.

On the golf and tennis training, he said it stressed academic excellence as only those with good grades were chosen to undergo training.

"We want to develop new talent in golf, tennis and swimming, but more importantly, we want them to be thinking players," he said. "We want players who strategise to win and who know how to use their brains as well as their skills."

Since its launch three years ago, the programme produced four accomplished players - Thilaga Muthi, Mohd Rais Sazni Mohd Rodzi, Mohd Khairul Anwar and Low Kwai Loon.

Thilaga, 13, represented Perak in the 2002 Sukma Games.