

09/04/2003

Cabinet can reshape minds of Malaysians

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THE depressing thing about having a proud past that outstrips your present is that, logically there isn't a future to speak of.

For, if we are still waxing lyricals over what we did yesterday, it would appear that we have not done anything worthy, today, and consequently are not likely to do anything worthy tomorrow either.

While the nation may have taken great strides in its leap of faith into the world of science and technology, in sport, our greatest achievements have, however, been mainly confined to what we, the older generation of Malaysians have come to fondly refer to, as "the good old days".

In the blame-game, the main targets have been the errant sports associations, indifferent schools sports councils, unmotivated and pampered athletes, uncaring officials, and ineffectual leadership.

But the rot, though as unwittingly as it may be, actually took root in the quest for a developed nation status. As a multitude of minds worked in consonance towards the cause of the nation, left behind in the paper chase and push for economic progress, was once a powerful tool of national unity, called sports.

As education policies shifted its focus on the pursuit of academic excellence, and as playing fields kept being taken away from the kids in the name of economic development, the support system that had once been the pillars of sporting excellence, collapsed under the weight of Vision 2020 and beyond.

While Vision 2020 should still remain the Malaysian dream, sport shouldn't become its persistent nightmare.

Which is why there has been a concerted call led by Olympic Council of Malaysia president, Tunku Imran Tuanku Ja'afar, for a Cabinet directive to instruct the ministries of Education, Defence, and Housing and Local Government - the crucial components in this equation - to include sports in their scheme of things.

Squash Rackets Association of Malaysia president Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir in supporting this call, came up with a brilliant suggestion - inception of a sports university that will strike that sweet balance between academic and sporting excellence.

This is what Malaysian sport needs. We have been losing hundreds of talented athletes to academic pursuits all because the existing education system isn't designed to accommodate both.

Though it's no fault of theirs, the 4-1 ratio of women teachers as opposed to men, hasn't helped the sport agenda either. But because the education system has been sport-unfriendly, this irregularity was never addressed.

But this problem can be solved if the bigger schools at least, are allowed to engage coaches for a small fee.

But even if the Cabinet comes up with such a directive, there is that other grave concern - implementation. For, while we Malaysians are great planners and policy makers, we have shown so often, that we lack the sustaining power to follow through.

To quote an old Malay proverb, we have been guilty of the "hangat hangat tahi ayam" syndrome. To put it simply, we Malaysians start things which we don't or can't finish.

Still, we need that Cabinet directive, to get things going. The Cabinet can't be vocal of the poor state of Malaysian sport, and yet remain silent

when it comes to doing something about it.

Sure, our soccer is nothing to shout about, and neither is our athletics, or even badminton. But this is a cry for help, and the Cabinet are the only ones who can reshape both the minds of Malaysians, and the circumstances to reinstate that strong sports culture back in our lives.

For frankly, we are all tired of singing that "those were the days, my friend" song.