

05/04/2003

FAM joins call for directive

Lazarus Rokk

FOOTBALL Association of Malaysia deputy president Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah yesterday threw his firm support behind the call for a Cabinet directive to deploy more ministries in efforts to achieve world excellence in sports.

And one of the ministries Tengku Abdullah said is crucial in this equation, but hasn't been playing its role, is the Ministry of Education.

"I totally agree that if Malaysian sports is to achieve the world class level that some Cabinet ministers, including our Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad), would like to see, then they should be more pro-active.

"There is little point in saying that we are not up to world standards when the Cabinet does not follow it up with directives that will enable national associations achieve better results," said Tengku Abdullah.

The FAM deputy president was responding to calls by Olympic Council of Malaysia president Tunku Imran Tuanku Ja'far for a Cabinet directive to induce more enthusiasm for sports in three ministries - Education, Defence, Housing and Local Government.

He said this in a nasi bungkus dialogue session with the New Straits Times two days ago. Also present in this session, were OCM deputy president Datuk Dr M.Jegathesan, and OCM secretary general Datuk Sieh Kok Chi.

What Tengku Abdullah would like to see, especially since the Cabinet had not too long ago commented on the declining state of Malaysian soccer, is for it to direct the Education Ministry to be more supportive of sports in schools.

"Everyone is aware that the root of the declining standards of Malaysian sports, namely a high-profile sport like soccer, is at the grassroots levels.

"The education system over the past decade or so that has been obsessed with academic excellence, has all but killed the sports culture in schools.

"Principals and teachers have not been encouraging sports, whether competitive or otherwise, in schools. I don't blame them for that, but rather the system for advocating such sentiments.

"And this has made our task very difficult, for what we are faced with now is an alarming dearth of talents coming through the schools system.

"Just like in politics, sport too needs a strong base, strong grassroots support. And soccer certainly doesn't have that now," said Tengku Abdullah.

In saying that, the FAM deputy president has joined the clarion call for the Cabinet to review their mindsets on sport, and direct ministries to help Malaysian sport achieve world excellence which Malaysians crave for.

"Apart from the Education Ministry, the Housing and Local Government must also play its part. Making available parks, and fields in every residential area must be emphatically implemented.

"How can kids grow up in a sports culture when they don't parks to play on, or if their existing fields are being taken away in the name of economic development.

"For every field you take away to set up condos or whatever, you are depriving a sport of hundreds of talents.

"Which is why, until such time the Cabinet gets involved, we cannot be

held solely responsible for our failures, as the support group hasn't been very supportive."