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OCM must lay groundwork

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SPORTS Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein (pic) is confident a Cabinet directive for the betterment of sports can be obtained provided the Olympic Council of Malaysia produces strong reasons for one.

Agreeing that sport needs a concerted effort as it involves work from the bottom to the top, Hishammuddin said he personally, for one, would like to see more soccer fields but called on OCM to lay the groundwork before he broaches the subject with the Cabinet.

Hishammuddin said there was already a good working relationship between the Sports Ministry and Education Ministry but if OCM feels there is a need for more ministries to be involved in sport, it should provide the reasons.

"I am prepared to discuss the matter with my Cabinet colleagues but OCM must state its reasons as to why there needs to be a Cabinet directive.

"I don't want any rhetorics, just strong facts to back the statement and I am sure that if I was to take the matter up, my colleagues in the Cabinet will study it in detail," said Hishammuddin at his ministry in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The call for a Cabinet directive was mooted by OCM president Tunku Imran Tuanku Ja'afar in a dialogue session with The New Straits Times last Thursday.

Tunku Imran said that if Malaysia considers sport as a serious business, then it was imperative for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad or the Cabinet to issue a directive to all the relevant ministries to accept it as part of their mandate.

Taking Malaysian sport to world class excellence, said Tunku Imran, went beyond the ambit of the Sports Ministry and he called on the Government to ensure the Education, Defence, and the Housing and Local Government ministries embrace sport and play a role in development.

Hishammuddin said a Cabinet directive was just one way of getting other ministries involved in sport.

"OCM can also approach the ministries directly and raise the issues with them. Personally, with (Housing and Local Government minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting), I would like to see more fields for soccer.

"This is an issue that OCM can take up with the ministry. What I am saying is that I would like to see more groundwork from OCM, in gathering reasons for a Cabinet directive for the involvement of more ministries as well as for development."

Hishammuddin said the ground work he did in getting a Sports Ministry-Education joint-working committee has yielded results.

"Actually, we are already heading in this direction (the involvement of more ministries) and the joint working committee will play a major role in Malaysian sport realising the five-year and 10-year targets."

Hishammuddin said the joint committee was addressing not just sport in schools but also at institutions of higher learning.

In fact, national athletes can now gain easier entry to universities and most of those in the 2006 Programme can look forward to obtaining their degrees as they continue with their sports careers.

"In fact, I have gotten the committee to agree that one representative from OCM sits in and Tunku Imran will represent OCM."

The bottom line, said Hishammuddin, was ensuring excellence.

"If OCM feels that more ministries need to be roped in, I am prepared to

raise the issue with the Cabinet but as I said, I need facts."