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Sport needs a Cabinet directive

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OLYMPIC Council of Malaysia president Tunku Imran Tuanku Ja'afar believes that if Malaysia considers sports as a serious business, then it is imperative for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad or his Cabinet to issue a directive to all the relevant ministries to accept it as part of their mandate.

By that, he means Education, Defence, and the Local and Housing ministries. The task of taking sports to the level of excellence that Malaysians crave for, Tunku Imran said, goes well beyond the ambit of just the Sports Ministry.

"Until mindsets change and the other ministries like Education, Defence and the Local and Housing Ministry embrace sports and want to do something about it, developing sports will be an uphill task.

"If we want to inculcate a sports loving culture, the directive must come from the Cabinet to ensure all ministries look at sports as part of their mandate," said Tunku Imran during a "Nasi Bungkus" dialogue session with The New Straits Times at Balai Berita yesterday.

Also present at the session were OCM deputy president Datuk M. Jegathesan and secretary-general Datuk Sieh Kok Chi.

New Straits Times Press Group Editor-In-Chief Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad chaired the session.

"Is it just a coincidence too that Malaysians did well in the past because the first two Prime Ministers (Tengku Abdul Rahman Putra and Tun Abdul Razak) were avid sportsmen themselves. Maybe it is worth analysing it," said Tunku Imran.

"And maybe it is also time to do a study to find out when sports started its decline in schools, and under which Minister.

"But having said that, sports development is not the sole responsibility of the Sports Ministry. The Education Ministry has a role to play, the Defence Ministry has a role to play and likewise with the Local and Housing Ministry," added Tunku Imran.

"All we are asking is for the directive from the Cabinet. Once that is done, the message will filter downwards. We are not requesting for additional funding but to use the current resources in place."

While the Government's emphasis on high performance sports is paying off, as evident with the success of the national contingent in the various multi-sport games, there is a striking imbalance in the area of grassroots development.

"Once the directive is given, the Education Minister will direct his State Education directors and they in turn, will direct the school principals," said Tunku Imran.

"If the teachers are unable to supervise during weekends, allow national sports associations or the Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) to organise training sessions and competitions.

"And we are not asking them to open their doors to outsiders, it is for the students of that school."

Even talent identification has become an expensive affair, and this, Tunku Imran believes, is brought about by the small base of athletes to choose from.

"Just how important is sports to us?," asked Tunku Imran.

"If it is really important, then we need to have a concerted effort from all parties, and not merely leave it to the Sports Ministry alone.

"Everyone must believe that sports is part of their mandate as well, then we can see the sports culture developing in Malaysia."

And if it cannot come voluntarily, only a Cabinet directive can fix that.