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Why not? says Abdullah

K.M Boopathy; Glen Peters

ACTING Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi very much favours the idea of the Education, Defence and Local and Housing ministries working together to develop sports, instead of just the Sports Ministry.

Abdullah was asked his opinion on the call by Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM) president Tunku Imran Tuanku Ja'afar who said for sports to reach the level of excellence that all Malaysians crave for, other ministries like Education, Defence and Local and Housing must do their parts.

Tunku Imran said the task of taking sport to Asian and then world level goes well beyond the ambit of just the Sports Ministry.

"Why not? I think all these ministries can work together to develop sports," said Abdullah just before leaving the Sungai Long Golf and Country Club where he was the playing guest of honour in the Ansara Golf Challenge yesterday.

Tunku Imran made the call during a nasi bungkus dialogue session with the New Straits Times at the Balai Berita on Thursday.

The SRA of Malaysia (SRAM) president Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir feels that the directive from the Cabinet will be good in that it helps the national sports associations to reach out to the talents in schools.

"A Cabinet directive to allow the ministries to work hand-in-hand will be very good," said Mokhzani.

"The best thing is to have educational programmes from schools to universities where the students can continue to excel in sports and studies at the same time.

"Both ministries (Ministry of Education and Sports) should come up with a blueprint to ensure that the schools produce a continuous pool of talent.

"It is also time to re-evaluate the role of the Malaysian Schools Sports Council (MSSM)."

Mokhzani feels that having the Bukit Jalil Sports School (BJSS) and Bandar Penawar Sports School (BPSS) is a good move but the pool should produce at all levels. This is where the involvement of the schools, with the blessing of the Education Ministry, will be necessary.

However, Mokhzani hopes that a sports university is the next step, which could allow national athletes to focus on their international careers and gain paper qualification at the same time.

Mokhzani also said sports like squash will find it hard to implement due to the infrastructure needed to develop the game in schools but SRAM will be doing its best to approach the schools to unearth talent.

"Usually, development of squash is very minimal in schools and our pool of talents come from the nationwide development programmes.

"Many would prefer badminton or soccer compared to squash due to the facilities needed to play the game, and we are banking on our development programme to provide the talent."

However, if the three ministries decide to work together, Malaysian sports can look forward to brighter prospects in the search for world class excellence.