

Unable to solve football woes

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YOUTH and Sports Minister Datuk Azalina Othman Said is riled about the state of Malaysian football — but unable to do anything about it.

Her problems are two-fold: footballers and the Football Association of Malaysia.

She said both were not helping the ministry improve the sad state of Malaysian football for specific reasons.

Azalina said local footballers did not think their contributions could bring honour to the nation.

“There is a severe lack of awareness among them that sports can take the nation to new heights,” she said when winding-up on points raised by MPs during the debate on Budget 2007.

Azalina said Malaysian footballers did not have their heart in the game. In some countries, she said, footballers gave their best as they viewed sports as a ticket to educational opportunities abroad.

“Here, they don’t have to do anything as they get free education.”

On the FAM, she said the ministry had written to its president Sultan Ahmad Shah, and his deputy, Tengku Abdullah, to place the game under the ministry’s purview.

While Tengku Abdullah had

welcomed the idea, the FAM had refused, saying that Fifa rules prohibited government interference in the sport.

Datuk Mohamad Aziz (BN-Sri Gading) had complained that while a small country like Togo could produce a football team that played at the World Cup, Malaysia was nowhere near that standard.

On the future of football in Malaysia, he had asked about the role of the ministry in the matter.

Azalina said she had to live with the fact that Malaysians would never stop asking her about the poor performance of

the national football team.

She said her hands were tied as the ministry could only provide financial aid and advice through football associations.

She said the ministry had categorised football as one of the most important sports in the country. It was one of the eight core sports that received full government funding.

On the Higher Performance Sports Centre at Brickendonbury in Hertfordshire, England, Azalina reiterated that the cost of the proposed project was not RM490 million.

She said the cost would be decided by the Cabinet Committee on Sports on Sept 28.