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National squad rewarded

Sponsored stints and cash prize await Suzuki Cup winners

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PUTRAJAYA: Players of the victorious AFF Suzuki Cup team will be sponsored by the Government for attachment stints with prominent international football clubs in an effort to gear them for "bigger and greater successes".

The attachment offer comes with a cash reward totalling RM65,000 for each of the 25 players and coaches of the Harimau Malaya football team, whose win had raised patriotism among Malaysians to a "highly extraordinary level", said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

The cash reward comprises RM50,000 worth of shares in Amanah Saham Wawasan 2020, RM10,000 special incentive from the Government and another RM5,000 from the National Sports Council.

Najib also said the Youth and Sports Ministry would allocate RM500,000 to the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) to upgrade facilities like the gymnasium and sauna room at Wisma FAM in Kelana Jaya.

"We will let the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) decide on the players' attachment stints, which the Government will sponsor.

"We hope the experience will be put to good use in preparing our players physically, tactically and mentally for many more successes as Malaysia aims to become the football power house in Asia. The move will also help our Road to London (Olympic) 2012



Moulding champions: Najib with national football team captain Syafiq Rahim holding a replica of the AFF Suzuki Cup after the luncheon at Sri Perdana, Putrajaya. Looking on are (from left) Kelantan FA president Tan Sri Anuar Musa, Tengku Abdullah, Shabery and national coach K. Rajagopal.

quest," he said, adding that the country's football development would be a "national agenda and effort".

Najib was speaking at a luncheon to honour the national football team, which won the AFF Suzuki Cup after beating Indonesia by a 4-2 aggregate on Dec 29.

It was Malaysia's first victory since the cup was introduced in 1996. Also present to honour the team were FAM deputy president Tengku Mahkota of Pahang Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, Youth and Sports Minister Datuk

Seri Ahmad Shabery Cheek and other Cabinet members.

Najib said the victory proved that the team could work together, transcending race with good tactical skills and mental strength.

Najib also confessed to having "felt like crying" when Malaysia made it to the finals after beating Vietnam, adding that he was happy to join thousands of Malaysian supporters in watching the match on a giant screen at Bukit Bintang.

"The tremendous sense of pride I felt for the team was overwhelming."