

# PM: DEVELOP FOOTBALL FROM GRASSROOTS

Emulate Vietnam, Chelsea to cultivate players, says Ismail Sabri

ADIB POVERA  
PUTRAJAYA  
news@nst.com.my

**M**alaysia should look at the success stories of the Vietnamese national team and the Chelsea Football Club in the English Premier League for the development of local football.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said a strong academy backed by planning helped Vietnam's Golden Dragons rise from the 172nd place in the world about 15 years ago to become the only team from Southeast Asia to make it to the decisive qualifying round of the 2022 Qatar World Cup.

"What differentiates Malaysia from Vietnam? The answer is football development from the grassroots level.

"The key to the increase in performance by the Vietnamese national team is the country's Hoang Anh Gia Lai academy, which has partnerships with Arsenal and JMG Academy in France, as well as backing from

Vietnamese conglomerates.

"If we strengthen our (football) development programmes, such as academies, starting from the district to the state levels, we can also produce good and talented players," he said during the groundbreaking of the Football Association of Malaysia's (FAM) headquarters in Presint 5 here yesterday.

Present were Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Faizal Azumu, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Dr Noraini Ahmad, and FAM president Datuk Hamidin Mohd Amin.

Ismail Sabri said he recalled that between the 1960s and 1980s, there were football leagues at the district level, where teams represented their villages.

He said the best players would be selected to represent their districts and then states.

"We can scout great talent if we continue to 'merakyatkan' (popularise) football with matches at the grassroots level."

He said Chelsea had a complete football ecosystem and one of the best grassroots programmes with players aged between 9 and 23.

"Apart from improving their technical capabilities, the club can increase the marketability and quality of players who don the blue jersey.

"This should be emulated by football clubs in the country."

He said the development of

Malaysian football should not be solely shouldered by FAM.

"It should instead be a national agenda, with cooperation between ministries, government-linked companies and the private sector, which can provide material and physical support.

"As reciprocation, with the human capital assistance available at FAM, national football could guarantee return on investment to meet sponsors' demands."

At the same ceremony, Ismail Sabri also announced a RM10 million contribution from the federal government to FAM this year.

He said the contribution reflected the government's support for the development of local football.

On the construction of the headquarters, which will be named Kompleks FAM Sultan Ahmad Shah, Ismail Sabri said it will preserve the late Sultan of Pahang Sultan Ahmad Shah Sultan Abu Bakar's legacy in national football.

Sultan Ahmad Shah was FAM president from 1984 until 2014.

"This is the highest recognition we can accord to preserve the legacy of Almarhum (the late Sultan Ahmad Shah) for all his contributions to sports, especially football."

*Page 1 pic: Children playing football near a padi field in Alor Star recently.*