

By : DATO' SRI MOHD NAJIB TUN ABD RAZAK
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SPEECH BY
YAB DATO' SRI MOHD NAJIB TUN RAZAK
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE
MALAYSIAN SPORTS SCIENCE ACADEMY
AT GRAND BALLROOM, MANDARIN ORIENTAL HOTEL
KUALA LUMPUR
24TH FEBRUARY 2005 (THURSDAY)
AT 3.00 P.M.

Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Dato' (Dr) Elyas Omar, Founder Chairman and President of Malaysian Sports Science Academy,

Yang Berhormat Dato' Hishamuddin bin Tun Hussein, Minister of Education,

Yang Berhormat, Dato' Dr Haji Shafie bin Mohd Salleh, Minister of Higher Education,

Dr Tom Rosandich, President, United States Sports Academy,

Yang Berbahagia Dato' Loy Teik Ngan, Managing Director, Taylor's Education Group,

Heads of Malaysian Sports organizations,

Ladies & Gentlemen.

Sports for the Nation: A New Agenda

First of all, I wish to thank the Malaysian Sports Science Academy for organising this very timely seminar and also for giving me the honour of launching MSSA and delivering the key note address.

1. Since independence, our nation has been pragmatic in its development efforts. Our government has always ensured that the development strategies and programmes had a beneficial effect on the people, both directly and indirectly.
2. From an agrarian economy, Malaysia today boasts of an economy that is largely driven by the manufacturing sector. While the physical and economic development of the country keeps advancing, we have reached the stage where we don't have to keep talking about development to carry it out. Physical and economic development have become a natural progression for Malaysia.

3. As such, in this day and age, changes are becoming more profound more rapidly. So it is necessary for sports, too, to have a new agenda. Just as the nation has a new agenda to reenergize the people and make all the people feel they are all involved in making the nation move forward, so do sports, especially the need to lay a firm foundation for an orientation towards achievement.

4. This new agenda should be based on the premise that sport is the simplest of all languages. It is understood by everybody. And its message is easily understood: That anyone can achieve anything in life. It promotes hard work, dedication and determination and also sports as an integral component of nation-building in reflecting honesty, integrity, and leading a healthy lifestyle.

5. The Cabinet Committee on Sports that I chair was set up to energise the country to achieve excellence in sports not for the sake of sports alone but also for the nation. We want to ensure that excellence in sports is not just for a handful of people but for all the people, especially those who create the pyramid that hoists the champion onto the pedestal.

MSSA Role

6. I am pleased to note that the Malaysian Sports Science Academy is coming up with a completely new approach, a scientific approach, towards all aspects of sports. It is also taking the right direction by being involved in research and development as well.

7. The establishment of the Academy reflects another new facet in the role being played by the private sector, in expanding the private education market to incorporate sports as well. The move is in line with the Government's aspiration for education, training and retraining to become market responsive and meet the market demand.

8. I would like to see the establishment of MSSA creating the motivation for schools, both primary and secondary, as well as colleges, universities, vocational institutes and other institutions of higher learning playing a more active part in sports development.

9. Furthermore, sports and educational institutions must develop a hand-in-glove relationship. And this process should include paying attention to staffing. Institutions of higher learning focus on getting the top academic people to work for them. Likewise, they should go for sports professionals. Schools on the other hand must get their teachers more involved in sports, not to leave it only to the physical education teachers.

10. In yesteryears, teachers had a passion for both teaching and sports. Teachers taught history or geography or mathematics in the classroom and after school were at the school field, in the halls or on the courts coaching or training athletes, and helping to organise inter-class and inter-house tournaments. They didn't regard it as a burden, rather they enjoyed it, and they imbued their charges with the spirit of sportsmanship and healthy competition. Students used to look forward to evenings on the field or on the courts. That spirit needs to be regenerated.

11. Likewise, MSSA can also be a boon to sports associations. They urgently need to inject professionalism in their activities. This is not just in terms of management but

also in training, marketing, financial planning and resource development and management.

Leadership in Sports

12. There is no doubt about the immense importance of leadership in sports ventures, in nurturing and sustaining championship material. In this context, our sports history is adorned with achievements that were realised through leadership that emanated from the corporate ranks.

13. These corporate leaders from both the public and private sectors ably demonstrated that sports can be part and parcel of corporate life as well as a corporate contribution to the wellbeing and health of society. Hence it was that teams from Prisons, PKNS, DBKL, commercial houses and banks, among others, made a name for themselves in the leagues. Local authorities are in fact the ideal situation to show leadership in bringing about this revival.

14. In Denmark, for instance, there are more than 100,000 badminton clubs, even though that country has never won the Thomas Cup. People there play for the sake of playing, and they believe that when they do something they should do it well. Imagine the spin-offs from that – the amount of racquets, nets and shuttlecocks sold, the sports shoes and clothes that are marketed, the facilities that are rented out. Imagine the number of coaches, their assistant, umpires and others who make a living from this.

Parents and sports careers

15. While the government and sports bodies play a significant role in promoting sport, there is another important community that is often overlooked. That is the parents. It is the parents who get the children started on sport and shuttle them to and from school to the training centres. As such, if we want to effectively tackle sport in the country, we have to get this partnership with parents working effectively.

Sports as meaningful and rewarding career

16. The government is addressing sports as meaningful and rewarding career. To ensure that there are careers in sports, among the issues we are looking at is resolving the problem of sports personalities quitting in their prime because they do not see a better future in sports.

17. The government hopes that the measures it is drawing up will help make sports a gateway to a host of meaningful, rewarding careers, and thus encourage children to continue participating in sports.

18. It is also important that sports personalities are given due recognition if the country wants to produce world class athletes. This will be an incentive for the young, who will see that sports can provide a future for them. If sports-based career opportunities can be developed, a big burden will be lifted from the shoulders of the athletes and their parents.

19. In these efforts the government does not want athletes to be stereotyped for sports science courses only as there are other fields of study that an athlete can pursue at the institutions of higher learning.

20. We must also ensure that there is life for athletes after their playing days are over. Athletes spend a lot of time training, and after dedicating so much of their time to sports, in the end most of them find that they do not have anything to fall back on once their playing days are over. This could be one of the factors that discourage young athletes from making a career in sports. Thus, the cabinet committee recently announced the pension scheme for athletes who won medals in the Olympic games as a step to recognize their contribution at the highest level.

Sports science

21. The most striking feature of the 2004 Athens Olympics was the emergence of China as a world sports power. Its haul of 32 gold, 17 silver and 14 bronze medals is ample demonstration of how prominent a role sports science played in its meticulous preparations. It is obvious that China's emphasis on sports science provided the cutting edge and confidence to take on the world's best, and beat them.

22. The Athens Olympics also exposed one of Malaysia's major weaknesses, which is the failure to use sports science to maximise the performance of our athletes. The pity is that sports science is not something new in Malaysia. Universities have degree courses in sports science, some have sports science units, and the National Sports Institute has made available sports science applications.

23. Sports science allows us to understand performance in sports, how it is done, how we can improve it, what things can go wrong, how to handle them when they go wrong, how to prevent these things, how people can misuse scientific knowledge, how to prevent abuse as well as to increase enjoyment and marketability.

24. All this is beginning to change now. The Youth and Sports Ministry is spearheading the move to apply sports science to all sports in Malaysia, with immediate attention being centred on the eight sports that the Cabinet Committee on Sports has identified for special focus. They are badminton, bowling, squash, swimming/ diving, hockey, athletics, gymnastics and football.

25. The move to concentrate on sports science is also geared towards preparation for the 2006 Asian Games to be held in Doha, Qatar.

26. But the government is also aware that sports science methodologies will not do anything for the athletes if there is no interaction and cooperation between sports science experts, coaches and athletes.

National Sports Institute

27. In this context, the National Sports Institute will be upgraded so that research and development work will be fundamental to any programme.

28. Rather than becoming a mere support group, the Institute will become fundamental and central to the nation's sports programmes. The NSI is already seeking new hi-tech training methods through the application of sports medicine and

science to enhance the performance of athletes to compete against international athletes.

Sports and education

29. The Education Ministry and the Higher Education Ministry are beginning to take steps to address the issue. The Cabinet Committee on Sports has instructed the Ministry of Higher Learning to develop a system to reward students who excel in sports by giving extra credit hours. Completing a certain number of credit hours is a prerequisite to graduating from any university. Each course in the university is subject to one, two or more credit hours which normally consists of lectures, assignments, practical work, tutorials and other academic-related requirements.

30. It may also be timely for universities to consider sports as a priority criterion for entrance, not only in sports science but also other courses.

31. The National Sports Policy states that sports and physical education should be given the same importance as other subjects and disciplines like health, science and economics. Physical and health education and sports are meant to be an integral component of activities in schools and teacher-training colleges in Malaysia. The promotion of health, physical fitness and sports has always been acknowledged as a primary goal of physical and health education in Malaysia.

32. Values in our education philosophy include the need to help students develop their physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual well-being and become all-round individuals. It is important for the students to have basic health, physical fitness and games skills for healthy living. Responsibility for health and physical fitness confronts every individual throughout his or her life. No one can escape these decisions.

33. Therefore, schools not only need to provide students with the skills to read and write but, most importantly, need to enrich their physical, mental and social being as well.

Intelligent athletes

34. For Malaysia to realise credible sports achievements, we need a sports community that is intelligent. No, high IQ is not the criterion. It's about thinking, about using their heads.

35. The world's top sports performers are not just all brawn; they are able to use their brains to know what needs to be done to achieve those performances and how to go about it, and also how to maintain that edge streak. And that requirement also applies to others in the sports community as well, especially those who administer the various sports.

Volunteerism in sports

36. Our country had, in the early years, a proud tradition of such volunteerism in sports, people contributing their time and efforts to sports, and the only reward they sought was the flourishing of the sport.

37. This volunteerism still exists but we need to reinvigorate this spirit as we did

during SUKOM. Australia is telling story of success in this arena. In Australia in 2001, over 1.7 million adults volunteered for sport and recreation organisations.

38. For Malaysia to be a credible player on the world sports stage, we need to develop this form of volunteerism in a strategic, well planned manner so that these people work towards clearly-defined goals. And that could well lead to the blossoming of a sports culture that all Malaysians can be proud of.

Conclusion

39. The government is developing a blueprint that will provide an overall strategic vision for sports in Malaysia, from grassroots to international level. We anticipate that MSSA will play a prominent role in assisting us and advancing the interests of sports in our nation.

40. I commend MSSA for this initiative and look forward to the Academy's role in jumpstarting a new era in sports science and development in Malaysia.

On that note it gives me great pleasure to officially launch The Malaysian Sports Science Academy.

Thank you.