

Phoong: Stop the politics within sports associations

NST 10.8.2019 24

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KOTA KINABALU: State Youth and Sports (KBSS) Minister, Phoong Jin Zhe urges individuals within any sports association in Sabah to stop politics within the association and focus on developing their respective sports.

"I want sports to replace non-sensical political agendas within our sports associations because it does not benefit the development of sports here in Sabah.

"All this while, we can see within most sports association whether it is State or district ones, there is always a lot of political conflicts, we have athletes not getting along with the coaches, or coaches in a bad relationship with the associations or State government.

"We need to stop this useless trend and put sports development as a priority above anything else," he said, when met after his working visit to the Human Performance Lab at University Malaysia Sabah (UMS), here on Friday.

During the visit, Phoong witnessed the first trial session for Sabah's 2020 Malaysia Games (Sukma) track and field athletes where they underwent a number of fitness and performance tests conducted by UMS officials.

"Today (Friday) marks the beginning of the first phase of Sabah's preparations for next year's Sukma Games in Johor through our cooperation with UMS in the field of sports science.

"I have visited and looked at the high performance athletes' facilities here, where it can train and analyse the capabilities of each athlete, for us to outline what needs to be improved before Sukma starts next July.

"Since we have roughly a year left, we need to take all the tests as soon as possible and begin the quality improvement of training professionally and scientifically.

"The programme needs some financial help and I will help in this regard to ensure our athletes get the best possible help as they will represent Sabah and be our hope at Sukma.

"During last year's Sukma Games in Perak, we finished sixth with our best medal haul of 33 gold, 27 silver, 45 bronze medals, and this time we are committed to improve that record, next year," he said.

Phoong continued: "Today I saw a few State athletes being tested and having their data analysed. This is a great way for us to monitor and encourage them not only during training,



WORK IN PROGRESS ... Phoong (third left), and other officials analysing athletes' data during the visit, yesterday.

but also paying attention to the athletes' welfare including allowances and scientific assistance.

"Sports science is one of the aspects that I want to delve into in more detail because, in recent times, things have changed. Since I took over the ministry, we have used more sports science theories to help our athletes.

"I have directed my ministry to look at the current assistance system namely anything related to finance and management to ensure that our athletes get what they deserve, in terms of training, performance analysis, sports science and other aids ... not political agendas.

"We do not want to hear anymore rumours stating that because certain athletes have good relationship with the coaches, hence they will be 'automatically' included into the final list, this is not helping to improve our sports scene.

"We want dedicated athletes that display their true potentials during trials or training and that they show that they deserve to be selected to represent Sabah," he said.

Phoong explained that Sabah's preparations for Sukma Games is slightly behind the planned schedule but everything will get back on track with its initial planning.

"The Sabah Sports Council (MSN Sabah) has taken over the preparation plan of athletes from each State association. This means the ministry will need to use additional funds to

accommodate for the Sukma Games preparations.

"In the last Sukma Games, we took six months to prepare, however this time around we want to extend the preparation period by a couple of months, therefore I urge all athletes to give their fullest commitment.

"A number of our athletes are currently undergoing centralised training with the national team for the upcoming SEA Games, even so we still carry out micro monitoring and management for the Sabah athletes there in order to keep up-to-date with their data," he stated.

The SEA Games will take place in the Philippines from November 30 to December 11, yet Phoong said that KBSS will continue to monitor the selected State athletes' welfare.

"I have directed KBSS staff to refer regularly on our athletes currently training in Peninsular Malaysia, see what they need, and assist them, because any negative issues will effect their training there.

"Although their welfare should be the responsibility of the Federal government as they are representing Malaysia at the SEA Games, KBSS will not sit idly by and let the Federal government take care of all their welfare, we will continue our responsibilities to support the Sabah athletes there," he added.

In this one year before the start of next year's Sukma Games, Phoong wants sports

science and professionalism to be transparent and sincere as it will play an important role in Sabah's success in Johor.

Meanwhile, he is also grateful for the assistance and cooperation provided by UMS in guiding and training the State's Sukma Games athletes through the use of high performance sports equipment and training facilities.

"Some of the equipment here costs around RM500,000 and some even cost almost a million ringgit for a unit. So to be able to use these facilities, I am very grateful to be able to work alongside with UMS.

"I have also asked MSN Sabah and UMS to continue this collaboration not only for the Sukma Games preparations, but also for the continuous training of high performance athletes in the State.

"As a minister, I have to fight for the demands of the State's athletes, especially in obtaining more funding from the State government. They (athletes) need the best assistance possible and we have to help them no matter what," concluded Phoong.

Also present during the visit were KBSS Assistant Minister Arunarsin Taib, MSN Sabah Director Mohd Asneh Mohd Noor, UMS Education and Psychology Faculty Dean Prof. Dr. Ismail Ibrahim, UMS Physical Fitness Chief Coordinator Prof. Dr. Dg. Maryamah Ag Daud and MSN Sabah Assistant Director Valerie Wong.