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EXCLUSIVE | EXAMINE | EDUCATE | ENTERTAIN

KAJAI AWARD WINNER OF 2014 & 2015

PRODUCER OF WORLD-BEATERS

MORE than 50 athletes from sports schools have been catapulted onto the Olympic stage since the first such educational institution was formed in 1996. A 60-year-old system lies at the heart of the Education Ministry's highly successful programme.

» REPORT BY AINA NASA ON PAGES 4 & 5



'IMPOSE RM500,000 FINE, 10-YEAR JAIL
TERM ON FAKE NEWS OFFENDERS'

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MORE THAN 250,000 CHINESE TOURISTS
FLOCKING TO MALAYSIA FOR CNY

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SPORTS SCHOOLS

SHAPING WORLD-CLASS ATHLETES

Malaysia has produced remarkable and outstanding athletes using a 60-year-old triangle method, writes **AINA NASA**

GROOMING seemingly ordinary individuals to become world-class athletes is not for the faint-hearted, but the Education Ministry, working hand-in-hand with national sports bodies, has the eye to identify a diamond in the rough early on.

Utilising a 60-year-old triangle method of having a large pool of students sifted upwards as they excel, our national schools have produced athletes who have flown the Jalur Gemilang high and proud in foreign lands.

From this, five sports schools alone have produced more than 50 Olympians since the first one, Bukit Jalil Sports School, was opened in 1996.

This proves impressive for a baby nation of 32 million people,

although still on the road to clinching its first Olympic gold medal since its involvement in the Games some seven years after achieving independence.

Education Ministry sports director Dr Mehander Singh told the *New Sunday Times* that churning out world-class athletes year after year was something people outrightly demanded, but they were clueless on the complexity of achieving it.

“Our pyramid system begins with the school population of roughly 5.2 million students, who compete at the most basic level, between classes and houses at their individual schools.

“As they go on, 800,000 of these student athletes manage to compete at district level, and subsequently 100,000 of them at

state level.

“At the very top of the pyramid, at the national level, 12,000 to 14,000 student athletes in the country vie for a place as the nation’s best.”

This stable pyramid system ensures the best athletes start from the beginning, he added, identifying them early on and harnessing them to glory.

A prime example of this is Southeast Asia’s sprint king Khairul Hafiz Jantan, who rose from the ranks as an athlete at school level to international level.

The 19-year-old Melaka native ended Malaysia’s 14-year drought of a gold medal in the men’s 100m dash at the Kuala Lumpur Sea Games last year, clocking in 10.38 seconds.

Mehander said the country’s sports development had come a long way, paving the way for a cluster of today’s future athletes.

He also stressed that an element that would not be overlooked in the process of developing athletes was education, which was the reason sports schools primarily take academics very seriously.

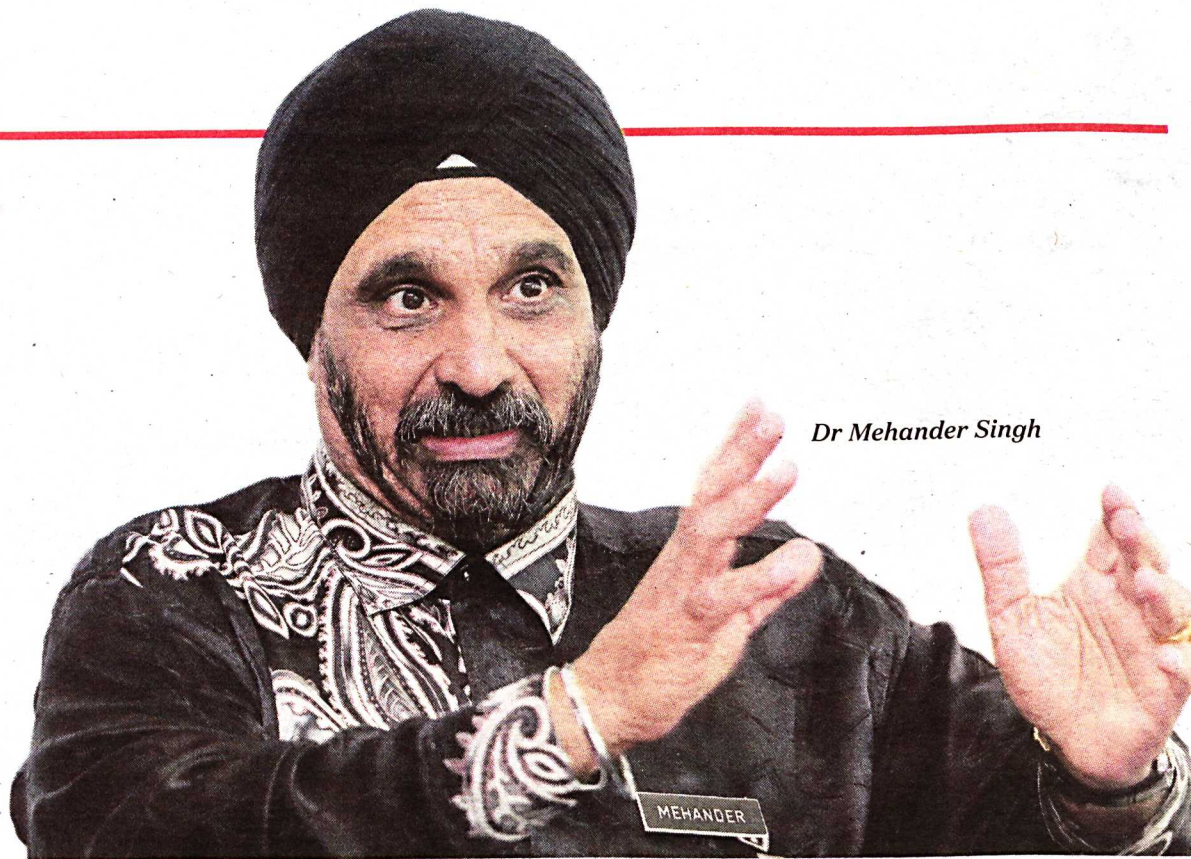
“We try to find a balance between academics and sports. If their sports career does not pan out, they need something to fall back on.

“Their career track should be diversified and education should be for life.”

The ministry’s sports deputy director, Zainal Abas, said an athlete’s career was akin to high-jump; the athletes must have something to land on after they have reached their peak.

“While their sports career will not last until they are 50 or 60, their education lasts for a lifetime.

“This is why we prepare a platform for them in academics in addition to sports,” he said.



Dr Mehander Singh

A typical day in the life of a sports school student, he elaborated, started as early as 6.30am, when they begin their two-hour training.

Their academic classes start from 9.30am and ends about noon. Three hours later, they start training again. They spend their nights studying and making up for those lost contact hours due to competitions.

“We want thinking athletes. If Brazil can have a medical doctor in its World Cup team, Dr Socrates, why should we deprive our own student athletes of education?” he said, adding that even during their international travels, student athletes had academic modules with them to ensure they were not left behind in their studies.

Zainal was adamant that the system used by the ministry in partnership with the National

Sports Council, the Youth and Sports Ministry and other sports associations had borne fruit for the nation.

Not only has Bukit Jalil Sports School produced more than 50 Olympians, most of the medals Malaysia has won internationally have come from products of the nation’s sports schools.

“Looking forward, the parties involved, such as the Education Ministry, the Youth and Sports Ministry, the National Sports Council, the National Sports Institute, sports associations, parents and even the private sector must play their roles.

“To produce more champions, like Lee Chong Wei, Nicol David and Azizulhasni Awang, we must pool our resources, support and harness our student athletes until they stand on international podiums with the Jalur Gemilang raised and the Negaraku played.”

PANDELELA RINONG — National diver

“The investment the government has made in our sports schools is reflected in the number of world-class athletes we have.

Sports schools are like a platform for young athletes to advance into an elite team and pursue their studies at the same time.

To have world-class athletes, we need a world-class mentality. This means, we need to excel not just physically, but also mentally. I believe a great athlete also needs to take education seriously.

The more students in sports schools, the more we can nurture and identify talent.

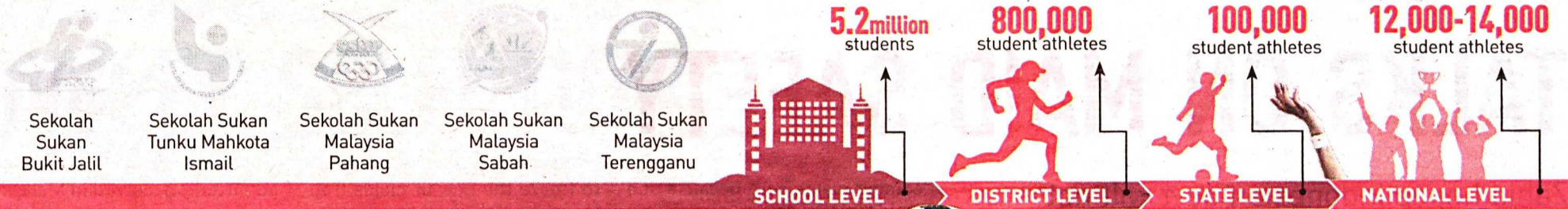
I managed to balance my sports training and academics, thanks to the flexibility of the school. I can be absent most of the time, but still get good results thanks to the modules given to me by my teachers.



Zainal Abas

NATIONAL SPORT SCHOOLS IN MALAYSIA

SYSTEM OF ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

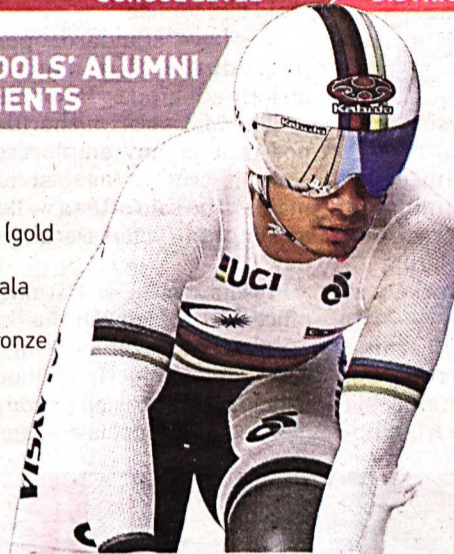


THE SPECIAL ONES

NOTABLE SPORT SCHOOLS' ALUMNI AND THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

MOHD AZIZULHASNI AWANG

- UCI Track Cycling World Championships in Hong Kong (gold medal in men's keirin)
- Southeast Asian Games in Kuala Lumpur (gold in men's sprint)
- Olympics in Rio de Janeiro (bronze medal in men's keirin)
- World Championships (silver medal in men's keirin)
- World Championships (silver medal in men's sprint)
- Malaysian Sportsman of the Year in 2009 and 2010



KHAIRUL HAFIZ JANTAN

- Southeast Asian Games in Kuala Lumpur (gold medal in 100m sprint)
- 2016 Asian Junior Athletics Championships in Ho Chi Minh (gold medal in 100m, silver medal in 200m and silver medal in 4x100m)
- Asean School Games in Brunei (gold medal in 4x100m, silver medal in 200m and silver medal in 4x400m)
- Malaysian outdoor record 100m holder with 10.18 seconds
- Malaysian national junior record 200m with 20.90 seconds



FACTFILE

- **2018 Budget:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced an allocation of RM20 million for the Bukit Jalil Sports School to improve its facilities
- **Since 1996:** Bukit Jalil Sports School has produced more than 50 Olympians
- **2016 Olympics in Rio:** Out of 32 athletes, 22 were products of the Bukit Jalil Sports School
- **2017 Kuala Lumpur Sea Games:** 140 athletes representing Malaysia were students, 46 were from the Bukit Jalil Sports School
- **Entrance fees for national sports school:** 100 per cent subsidised by the government, RM1 daily for meals

PANDELELA RINONG

2017

- World Aquatics Championship in Budapest (bronze medal in 10m synchronised platform)
- Southeast Asian Games in Kuala Lumpur (gold medal in individual 10m platform)

2016

- Olympics in Rio de Janeiro (silver medal in 10m synchronised platform)

2014

- Commonwealth Games in Glasgow (bronze medal in 10m synchronised platform and silver in 10m platform)
- Asian Games in Incheon (bronze medal in 10m synchronised platform)

DHABITAH SABRI

- Southeast Asian Games in Kuala Lumpur (gold in 3m springboard)
- Diving World Series in Windsor (silver in 10m synchronised platform)
- Southeast Asian Games in Singapore (gold medal in 3m synchronised springboard)
- Commonwealth Games in Glasgow (bronze in 10m synchronised platform)
- Southeast Asian Games (gold in 10m synchronised platform)



CHEONG JUN HOONG

- 7th Asian Diving Cup in Macau (bronze medal in 1m springboard)
- World Aquatics Championships in Budapest (gold medal in 10m platform and bronze medal in 10m + synchronised platform)
- Olympics in Rio (silver in 10m synchronised platform)
- Asian Games in Incheon (silver medal in 3m synchronised springboard and bronze medal in individual 3m)
- Asian Games in Guangzhou (bronze medal in 1m springboard)

KOO KIEN KEAT

- Olympics in London (lost in bronze medal match)
- All England Super Series Premier (second place)
- BWF World Championships Paris (second place)
- World Championships in India (bronze medal)



NAZMI FAIZ

- AFC Cup 2017 - Allianz Goal of the Tournament
- Signed two-year contract with Johor Darul Ta'zim (won 2017 Malaysia Cup and 2017 Malaysia Super League)
- Signed contract with Selangor (won 2015 Malaysia Cup)
- Signed with PKNS FC
- Signed three-year contract with Portuguese club Beira-Mar
- Sea Games in Indonesia (won gold medal)
- Drafted in Harimau Muda A for 2012 S. League campaign under Ong Kim Swee



BRYAN NICKSON LOMAS

- FINA Diving World Cup in London (bronze medal in synchronised 3m springboard event)
- World Aquatics Championships (11th place in 3m springboard)
- Asian Games in Guangzhou (silvers in synchronised 3m springboard and synchronised 10m springboard and bronze in 10m platform)
- Commonwealth Games in Delhi (bronze in 10m individual platform and synchronised 3m platform)

