

## FOOTBALL

# MULTI-RACIAL MISSION

Puskas award winner Faiz wants to help bring back the glory days of the 1970s

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**M**ALAYSIA were one of the the most feared teams in Asia in the 1970s. Footballers like Mokhtar Dahari, Ali Bakar, Shaharuddin Abdullah, Soh Chin Aun, Wong Choon Wah, R. Arumugam and Santokh Singh were among the stars who formed a multi-racial national team that put the country on the Asian football map then.

Now, former Puskas award winner Faiz Subri wants to help in bringing back the glory days of Malaysian football.

In the 1970s, Malaysia were on par with South Korea and Japan but over the years failed to maintain their superiority in Asia while their rivals have gone on to beat teams like Germany, Portugal, Italy and Spain in the World Cup.

Faiz, the only local footballer to have earned international recognition in recent times, is on a mission to encourage Malaysians of all races to play the game and represent the national team.

The Kedah-born forward will be working closely with Nazim Ariff Football Club (NAFC) to tap talents when they open their academies in Jitra and Penang.

“NAFC have plans to set up an academy in Jitra, my town, as well as in Penang to develop players from the 10-16 age group. That would be good, as I can still contribute to the sport close to home. I would like to see players from all races play for the country like in the 1970s.

“Since Penang has many Chinese players who can be developed, it would be a good place to house a NAFC academy. We need more Chinese, Indians and other races to play the game and also represent Malaysia.

“Sports is the best way to unite all races in this country. And in the spirit of the Merdeka month, it would be nice to envision a multi-racial football team in the near future,” said Faiz yesterday.

Despite winning the 2016 Puskas award, the 32-year-old is finding it difficult to find a club, based in the Northern region, who want to sign him.



Former FIFA Puskas award winner Faiz Subri (right) and NAFC chief executive Nazim Ariff Nazir Ariff at the press conference yesterday. PIC BY ROHANIS SHUKRI

The father of three last played in the M-League in the 2018 season for Penang.

“I still remember the day I went to Zurich to receive the award. I had a chance to mingle with Cristiano Ronaldo and other stars.

“The memory keeps me going, while I embark on small businesses to put food on the table.

“I have three children now, and even if I get an offer from a club, I would prefer it to be close to home (in Kedah) as I want to be with my family.”

On Feb 16, 2016, when playing for Penang, Faiz scored a physics-defying free-kick goal (which won him the FIFA Puskas award) against Pahang in a Super League match at City Stadium.

His brilliant strike was given the vote ahead of goals scored by five-time Ballon d’Or winner Lionel Messi and Neymar, among others. In Zurich, Faiz received the award from former Brazilian forward Ronaldo.

The Penang FA invited Faiz to trials with their Premier League

team in May, but he failed to secure a contract.

It is learnt that Faiz had also attended trials with other teams, including Perlis and Felda United this year but he failed to impress.