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Hishammuddin: Fikiran Syndicate will pay back the RM760,000 soon

SHAH ALAM, Fri. - The Youth and Sports Ministry is confident that Fikiran Syndicate, one of the three parties in the controversial South Pole millennium jump, will repay the RM760,000 "advance payment" by the middle of this month as scheduled.

Its Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said there was no cause for alarm as the company had the resources to pay back the money.

He was speaking to reporters after launching the "Jalur Gemilang" Challenge Programme at Universiti Teknologi Mara here tonight.

"I would like to stress again that the money was not a loan but an advance payment and given to them under exceptional circumstances," he said.

He said his deputy Datuk Ong Tee Keat had given to him the reports by those involved in the jump on the matter, but he needed clarifications before the findings could be made public.

Asked if the foreign expedition group had also submitted its report, he would only say: "everything will be revealed soon".

"We have got nothing to hide and once all the issues have been clarified we will reveal everything," he added. Asked about reports in a Malay newspaper today of rumours that he had decided on the Umno Youth candidates who "should win in the May elections" as they were the "people he could work with", Hishammuddin, who is the acting Umno Youth chief, said they were "a pack of lies".

"I am very disappointed with the rumours spread by people with evil motives. "They just want to create disunity in the party," he said. He said he wanted a clean election in May where no one would tarnish another's reputation.

On tonight's function which was graced by Datuk Azhar Mansor, the first Malaysian to sail solo around the globe, he said the nation was proud of Azhar's achievement and hoped local youths would emulate his commendable feat.

Perlis-born Azhar, 43, spent 191 days beginning Feb 2, 1999 and returned to Langkawi to a large welcoming crowd which included Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali. Azhar's achievement had been recognised by the World Speed Sailing Record Council.

Hishammuddin also said the Ministry planned to expand Azhar's Jalur Gemilang Challenge Rakan Muda programme to local private institutions of higher learning (IPTS).

This was based on the success of the programme held in local public tertiary education institutions (IPTA).

The programme had been expanded to five states and received overwhelming response, he said.

"The programme has been formulated and adapted for the Rakan Muda philosophy to inculcate endurance and fighting spirit as showed by Datuk Azhar," he told reporters.

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