

**Explain gov't role in S'wak ransom money, Zahid told
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Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi has been asked to explain the government's role in the RM12 million raised to free Sarawakian hostages recently released by the Philippine-based Abu Sayyaf militant group.

"Zahid said the government does not recognise kidnap-for-ransom activities and would not use funds for such purposes.

"If that be the case, the government must now explain why the authorities were (allegedly) involved in raising the RM12 million," said Puchong MP Gobind Singh Deo.

He said this was the impression that the government was giving, after Zahid **announced** the money raised would be given to an Islamic body in the Philippines instead of the kidnappers.

"The government must therefore explain as the impression created is that the money was indeed raised for the release of the four (hostages).

"As funds were allegedly secured from members of the public as well, this becomes a matter of public importance which warrants a public response," said the DAP national legal bureau chairperson.

Four Sarawakian sailors were abducted by the militant group on April 1, from a tugboat off the coast of Pulau Ligitan, Sabah.

Yesterday, the home minister was reported as saying the government had decided not to pay ransom, and since the hostages **have been freed**, the collected funds have been donated elsewhere.

'Not gov't's money to donate'

As reported today, Consumers' Association of Subang and Shah Alam (Cassa) president Jacob George pointed out that the money **belongs to the kin** as well as members of the public, who had responded to their cry for help, and thus should be returned.

"It is not government money, so who is he (Zahid) to decide to give it to an Islamic agency? It is the height of irresponsibility and is totally unacceptable," said Jacob.

Gobind said it was clear from reports that the money was raised to secure the release of the hostages at the time of their detention.

"So how the money could be used for something else instead?"

"The use of monies by a stakeholder for purposes other than that for which they were collected without consent could amount to a serious breach of trust, and even an offence depending on the facts and circumstances of a particular case," said the Puchong MP.

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