

Mahathir gives thumbs up to sports betting
Malaysiakini.com
June 14, 2010
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Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad does not object to federal government plans to license sports betting because it can help regulate the industry, currently run by underground syndicates.

"With or without a licence, there is a lot of betting going on in this country.

"The Chinese like to gamble," he said during a press conference after the Melayu Bangkit rally at the Terengganu Indoor Stadium in Kuala Terengganu this morning.

"Without licensing, there is no way to regulate (sports gambling)," he added.

Quizzed on Pakatan Rakyat's criticism of the move, Mahathir said its motive is purely political.

"They are doing it for politics and not (for) Islam. How could DAP (be expected to) uphold Islam? This is opposition politics. They are looking for mileage," he said.

NONEOpposition parties and many non-governmental organisations have voiced their objection to the issuance of the sports licence to Ascot Sports, a subsidiary of business tycoon Vincent Tan's (right) Berjaya Group.

BN component Gerakan and Johor state Umno have since joined the chorus against sports betting.

A massive rally to protest the government's move to legalise sports betting is on the cards early next month.

Its organisers hope to mobilise 100,000 to march through the streets of Kuala Lumpur to deliver a protest memorandum on the issue to the Agong.

Channelling funds to political parties

Tan has come under fire, not only because his company was awarded the highly lucrative sports betting licence, but for allegedly contributing to the political funds of BN component parties to secure contracts.

Asked if Tan is one of those who have contributed to Umno's political funding, Mahathir was coy in his reply.

"He gave the money (from the sale of Ascot Sports) to the (Better Malaysia) foundation, (so) it is (meant) to be given to all Malaysians, not to Umno," said Mahathir.

NONEHe claimed that Tan has been engaged in channelling funds to parties on both sides of the political divide.

"... (H)e is a businessman, and as a businessman I think he does not give to only one side. He gives to Umno, but I think he also gives to the opposition party as well," said the former premier.

He said the licence would stipulate that sports betting be limited to non-Muslims.

As such, Muslims would be deterred from taking part because it will be illegal for them to do so, comparing the betting ban to eating pork, an Islamic prohibition on Muslims but which non-Muslim have the right to enjoy.

"If a Malay is caught gambling, tangkaplah (arrest him)!" he said.

'Malay interests protected'

Mahathir also gave his approval to the recently announced 10th Malaysia Plan, describing it as a continuation of the New Economic Policy affirmative action towards solving the problems of Malays.

"The NEM, (the thrust of) which is included in 10MP, takes into account the criticism voiced by Malay NGOs. Hence it continues to protect the interests of Malays."

NONEOn another matter, Mahathir questioned plans by a group calling itself Fly2Gaza to send in aid to the Israeli-occupied enclave via air.

"If you put it (the aid supplies) in a plane, they (the Israelis) will just shoot it down," quipped Mahathir.

Mahathir had earlier received donations from the group as head of the Perdana Global Foundation at the conclusion of the Melayu Bangkit rally.

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