

'Incompetent finance minister' blamed for mix-up
Malaysiakini.com
July 08, 2010

Opposition parliamentarians ridiculed the Finance Ministry's administration for the recent string of missteps in responding to parliamentary questions on the sports betting licence.

Irking the parliamentarians further were three different written replies to one question on the consequences of legitimising the betting licence for the 2010 World Cup to Ascot Sports and whether 7-11 convenience stores and Sport Toto lottery providers would be made gaming outlets.

Jelutong DAP member of parliament Jeff Ooi asked that question yesterday, and in the first reply given, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, who is also finance minister, said the government had offered the licence to Ascot Sports for bookie services but excluding the 2010 World Cup.

The answer given also included the terms and conditions and the justification for issuing the licence.

A similar response was given to PAS' Pokok Sena MP Mahfuz Omar yesterday by the ministry, which raised doubts over the renewal of the licence.

NONE Later, in the evening, Ooi (right) was given a different answer, that the "government had decided not to issue the sports betting licence to Ascot Sports Sdn Bhd to run bookie operations in the country".

"The second answer should have been the first answer given... the finance minister didn't have to explain the terms or conditions because the plan was shelved," Ooi told reporters at the Parliament lobby.

All tied up in knots

Aside from yesterday's two contradictory answers, Ooi was given another response explaining further that the government was firm in its decision not to issue the licence, which Second Finance Minister Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah proclaimed when wrapping up the 10th Malaysia Plan debate on June 29.

"This is very peculiar... shouldn't the officer be briefed on the policy decisions of the minister? This just reflects the minister's weaknesses and failures," said Mahfuz, who was present at the press conference called by Ooi.

Alleging that Najib had "failed" in his duty as finance minister, Mahfuz urged him to step down and "give way to a more competent person to run the ministry".

Ooi, on his part, described newly-appointed Deputy Finance Minister Donald Lim as more proficient and not just a "yes-man".

He also advised Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Koh Tsu Koon, who is in charge of the government's key performance indicators (KPIs), to evaluate the finance ministry and the premier's responsibility.

"Koh is responsible for the National Key Results Area (NKRA). He should ask his boss about the finance ministry's KPI, and why there have been many flip-flops," said Ooi.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/136811>