

Asri defends Penang gov't, gambling revenue 'halal'
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Government aid derived from the gaming industry and distributed to the people is not deemed to be *haram* (forbidden in Islam), said former Perlis mufti Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin.

"This is because (the recipients) are not the ones involved in gambling and receive the aid because they are needy," he said in a statement today.

"It is the same as...if the government pays a food supplier with gambling revenue. The money is *halal* as it (the food supplier) derived it not from gambling but from food sales."

Asri said this in response to claims by Penang Umno that the state government is using revenue from gaming to provide assistance to the state's hardcore poor, some of whom are Muslim.

Umno Youth information chief Reezal Merican Naina Merican had recently produced a letter issued to the Penang Turf Club director, regarding a balance of contribution of RM500,000.

The letter, dated July 9 and signed by the chief minister's private secretary Farida Hani M Yacob, confirmed that the state had collected the contribution.

Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng has however refuted the claims.

"We don't even know if the money was from horse-racing betting. I don't know because the state has never approved gambling licences," he said.

According to Asri if the revenue is derived from gaming, the fault is born by the government and the gaming company, not the recipients of aid.

Even the salaries of state and federal civil servants are derived from all sorts of sources of revenue, he noted, some of which may include taxes on gambling, alcohol and entertainment venues.

In such cases, their salaries are likewise not considered *haram*, he said.

Nevertheless, Asri added that gambling is undoubtedly *haram* and that it is the responsibility of both state and federal governments to eradicate it.

'Reezal's hypocrisy'

Meanwhile DAP Youth chief Anthony Loke accused Reezal of hypocrisy for playing up an issue that ultimately traces back to the BN federal government.

"For Reezal's information, part of the management and development expenditure comes from gaming, which he claims to be *haram*," he said in a cutting statement today.

"This includes the salaries and allowances of the premier, deputy premier and cabinet ministers, some of whom lead Reezal's beloved party."

According to Loke, who is Rasah parliamentarian, this was affirmed by a June 9 written reply to a question he had posed to Finance Minister Najib Abdul Razak in Parliament.

The reply reads: 'Gaming revenue is classified as tax revenue. According Article 97 of the federal constitution and Financial Procedure Act 1957 (revised 1972) this must be credited into the Consolidated Fund [...] just like any other government revenue, and used for purposes of national management and development.'

Najib added that the government is in the midst of coding revenue from gaming, 'which will be channeled to expenditures allowed by Islam'.

"Does Reezal, who was once political secretary for a finance minister, not know (this)?" Loke asked.

"It is up to him to decide Whether this is an insult to Muslims and Umno leadership."

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