

Senior citizens return 'haram' RM100 cash awards
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Several senior citizens from the local Muslim community have returned the RM100 cash received as part of Penang's senior citizens appreciation programme as the money is suspected to come from gambling sources.

State opposition leader Azhar Ibrahim held a small ceremony in Penaga yesterday where about 40 elderly folks aged 60 and above, reportedly returned the money to Umno as they felt 'cheated' receiving cash from a dubious source.

Azhar, who is Umno state liaison committee secretary, said the recipients organised the ceremony as they did not know who to return the money to.

The Penaga assemblyperson warned that more senior citizens were expected to return the money to the Umno committee before the state Youth wing hands over the cash to Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng.



"They are suffering from mental anguish and emotional distress at having received cash aid from non-halal sources and they are terrified at the thought of spending the money," Bernama reported Azhar as saying.

On Sunday, Azhar accused Lim for lying about using money from gambling sources to support programmes for the hardcore poor, which included the state's Muslim community.

Recent expose

<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/143704>

He was referring to a recent expose by Umno information Youth chief Reezal Merican in Kepala Batas, involving a letter issued to the Penang Turf Club director, regarding a balance of contribution of RM500,000.



According to Reezal (*left*), the letter dated July 9, signed by Lim's private secretary Farida Hani M Yacob, confirmed that the contribution had been collected by the state.

Lim, who is also DAP national secretary general, has denied the allegations, saying that the money used to fund the appreciation programme was the direct result of weeding out corruption.

He added that the a donation from the turf club was for anti-poverty efforts in Penang as there were non-Muslims who were also poor, while for Muslims, the state had been careful to use money from non-gambling activities.

Unconvinced of Lim's clarification, a group of former PKR MPs dubbed the Independent Consensus, said it was not against using gambling money to develop the state, however, it urged the former to 'clearly and convincingly' clarify further the recent controversy.



The group, who issued a statement on the matter, comprised of MPs Zahrain Mohamed Hashim (Bayan Baru), Wee Choo Keong (Wangsa Maju), Zulkifli Noordin (Kulim Bandar Bharu), Tan Tee Beng (Nibong Tebal) and Mohsin Fadzli Samsuri (Bagan Serai).

"Lim should be more transparent and courageous to handle the Penang people's concerns, especially, those from the Muslim community," the Consensus said.

"Answers (in the form of) denials and press statements is not enough to convince the rakyat," it added.

Initial denial

The MPs said that Lim's attitude of initially denying the matter, then admitting that some of the funds were indeed used to support programmes for the poor and senior citizens after documents were revealed, have caused suspicion among the Muslim community.

"In an environment which is multi-racial and where the Muslim community is sensitive to gambling, it is more appropriate that the cash award (for senior citizens) not to be taken from gambling sources," said the group.

In an immediate response, state exco for environment, health, welfare and caring society, Phee Boon Poh (*right*) said the RM100 is not 'illegal money' (*wang haram*) as alleged by certain quarters.

Phee, who is Sungai Puyu assemblyperson, also denied that the state was facing financial problems (that it had to seek contributions from the turf club).

He added there is an allocation of RM20 million for this programme and the state has sufficient money to provide for the coming pay-outs.

The state is targeting about 10,000 more senior citizens and the next batch to receive the cash must register by today (Sept 30).

"I urged Umno to stop confusing the people with false allegations about the state's efforts to award the elderly as it only reflects their attitude of wanting to undermine the current administration," he added.