

**PKR threatens legal action against Star
Malaysiakini.com
November 29, 2010**

Penang PKR has threatened to send a letter of demand to English-language daily Star, for alleged defamation and character assassination of a state assemblyperson.

A news report on Nov 24, headlined 'Assemblyman lawyer to file defence over breach of ethics', had made reference to a legal suit against lawyer Jason Ong Khan Lee, who is PKR's Kebun Bunga assemblyperson.

At a press conference, Penang PKR vice-chairperson and Batu Uban assemblyperson Raveetharan Subramanian said the party is "utterly disappointed and embarrassed" with the way the newspaper has been "made use of".

"We would like to ask who has breached ethics when a newspaper sensationalises news like this. No court of law has proven our assemblyperson guilty but he has been put on trial by the media," said Raveetharan.

"Politics is (all about) perception. Let's not discredit a hardworking YB in his constituency...we may file a defamation suit to clear his name and the name of the party..."

"(We are not) punching bags...the newspapers are trigger happy and we are all under their scrutiny."

Raveetharan, a lawyer, told Star to apologise and retract the story.

He said Ong had done his best for his client without being paid a single sen, but has been accused of "all sort of ill-founded allegations".

"I can speak for all the fellow lawyers in Malaysia that your clients can be your worst enemies. (Although you help) them to solve their problems, they will bite you in return," he claimed.

When contacted, a Star representative said the newspaper will not comment on the matter.

The news report involved a suit against Ong to be mentioned on Dec 22. It was filed by a company, Asiabet Sdn Bhd, which produces customised playing cards.

The company is seeking the return of RM48,875 (US\$12,500) and interest of 8 percent on the amount since Oct 19, 2006 to date, with costs and other relief deemed fit by the court.

Ong is alleged to have withdrawn 'trust monies' from the client's account without authorisation, in breach of the Legal Profession Act.

Asiabet said it has also lodged a complaint with the Advocates and Solicitors Disciplinary Board and that the outcome is pending.

Source of problem

Ong said Asiabet had engaged him to settle a legal problem with an Australian-based company, VIP Gaming Solutions Pte Ltd (VIP).

VIP allegedly had not paid Asiabet for about 17 months for purchase of some playing cards at a price of US\$40,000. Only half of the amount was settled, he said.

Ong said he managed to help Asiabet retain US\$20,000 (RM76,038) and to dispose of the playing cards to a new buyer, to avoid a lawsuit.

As the Asiabet directors are his family friends, no fees or disbursements were paid to Ong or his firm, M/s Cheah Kah Peng & Ong.

Ong claimed that it was verbally agreed that, should Asiabet be able to claim any more money from VIP (later taken over by Stargames Corporation Pte Ltd), this would constitute his legal fees.

The plan ran into problem after Ong managed to obtain RM45,430.58 from Stargamem. He said Asiabet wanted 50 percent of this and refused to acknowledge it as the legal fee.

Ong said the bad publicity and "dirty and malicious" attack on him and the party was intended to "shoot me down" before the party congress which was held over the weekend.

He took particular offence at the word 'assemblyman' in the headline and report, saying this was not mentioned at all in the summons that was filed by the company.

"No one has found me guilty but the report shows mala fide (malicious intent) on the part of the BN/MCA-owned newspaper to discredit me. Many poison-pen letters have been sent to the party leaders and also the state assembly speaker about this," he said.

State deputy chief minister II Mansor Othman pledged full support for Ong, saying: "Let the law take its course but do not sensationalise this, as if it is correlated to problems that have affected the party lately.

"The party has been in the spotlight day after day, case after case, so we cannot take this lightly. We will fight back but, at the end of the day, we will leave it to the court to decide."

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