

DATE: 15/6/2010

'Nothing wrong with sports betting'

KUALA TERENGGANU: Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he found nothing wrong in the government's decision to allow sports betting as long as Muslims were strictly barred from it.

"This is my take on the issue. The Chinese, especially, like to gamble. If we do not allow (betting), they are going to do it anyway, through illegal means," he said at the "Melayu Bangkit" rally at the state indoor stadium here. He was asked to comment on protests by the opposition parties against this decision.

He said if Muslims were found to be involved, then the authorities should detain and punish them as it was against Islamic teachings adding that legalised betting would allow the authorities to monitor the gambling sector better.

Dr Mahathir denied allegations that Umno would be getting cuts from the issuance of the licence to business

"THE CHINESE, ESPECIALLY, LIKE TO GAMBLE. IF WE DO NOT ALLOW (BETTING), THEY ARE GOING TO DO IT ANYWAY, THROUGH ILLEGAL MEANS."

— *Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad*

tycoon, Tan Sri Vincent Tan.

Tan, the chairman and chief executive officer of Berjaya Corp Bhd (BCorp), sold his 70 per cent stake in his privately-owned Ascot Sports Sdn Bhd to BCorp last month after Ascot was given a conditional sports betting licence by the Finance Ministry.

Tan recently announced that he would donate the entire proceedings of the sale to charity.

Dr Mahathir said Tan, if he wanted to, need not rely on domestic business operations as he had successful ventures overseas.

"Even if he did donate the money, he would give it to a welfare fund enjoyed by the deserving and not Umno."

Dr Mahathir said the opposition's protest was politically-motivated and had nothing to do with religion or values.

"Don't tell me the DAP is suddenly interested in championing Islam. This is just a political game they are playing."

Dr Mahathir said if Pas wanted to be righteous on the issue, then he wondered why its leaders rejected calls from the floor at the recently held *muktamar* (general assembly) for all forms of gambling to be banned.

"We must separate religion from politics, but for Pas, Islam is their political tool."