

THE STAR

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Dr M: Make sports betting legal

Move will weed out illegal bookies and boost revenue

KUALA TERENGGANU: Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has given his backing to a proposal to issue licences for sports betting, saying that this will help legalise the industry as well as thwart illegal gambling.

He slammed opposition leaders for protesting against the issuance, claiming that they were just trying to gain political mileage.

"I don't understand DAP's rationale in protesting. It is not as if DAP is championing the tenets of Islam. They just want to make a mountain out of a molehill to garner political support," he said after delivering his keynote address at an inaugural rally organised by Gerakan Kebangkitan Rakyat's (People's Consciousness Movement) here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir also questioned PAS' motive in objecting to the plan as there were other forms of licensed gambling in the country.

"They are also against the plan, not because of Islam but to win political support. They are not against other types of gambling. They just want to find fault on football betting to get political attention," he said, adding that legalising sports betting was the only way to stamp out underground syndicates.

Dr Mahathir said even if the Government decided against issuing the licence, the Chinese would still continue to gamble as they had a passion for it.

"Sport betting is for the non-Muslims and it is their right to

gamble," he said, adding that the Government could not forbid them from gambling.

Dr Mahathir also scoffed at a suggestion that the Government was forced to approve the licence to millionaire Tan Sri Vincent Tan as gratitude for funding the Barisan Nasional in recent polls.

"Vincent Tan has been prospering in Vietnam, Korea and China. He is not desperate to find money here," he pointed out.

Dr Mahathir also said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak could consider calling for an early general election if it was confirmed that his approval ratings had climbed to 72% from 69% in a recent poll conducted by Merdeka Centre.

In Parliament, backbencher Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin called on the Government to legalise sports betting to curb illegal gambling, especially when the World Cup fever was at its peak.

He added that illegal bookies were raking in at least RM15bil per year in football betting, most of which was then channelled overseas.

"The Government should provide an option for non-Muslims to participate in legal sports betting activities. If we want to prevent a huge outflow of money from the country, then we should legalise sports gambling.

"The Government can gain revenue through taxes. It should also be made clear that only Muslims cannot gamble and drink," he said when debating the 10th Malaysia Plan.