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it's all politics

> **Mahathir: Opposition to sports betting is to gain political mileage**

KUALA TERENGGANU; Former premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday poked holes in the opposition by many quarters against the move by the government to issue a sports betting licence, saying it was done purely for political reason.

He said the government's move to issue such a licence must be accepted with an open mind to check rampant illegal gambling.

"Probably my opinion is different from the others. Whether the gambling licence is issued or not, gambling will still go on in the country because the Chinese generally like to gamble.

"So if they gamble without a licence, there is no way we can ensure that gambling is not rampant. This is because gambling is permissible to the Chinese, but prohibited or *haram* to the Muslims. So, the Muslims should not gamble. If they are found

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gambling, catch them," he said.

Mahathir said this when asked about the sports betting licence issue at a media conference after he had addressed a gathering of the *GerakanKebangkitanRakyat* (Gertak) or People's Awareness Movement, yesterday.

He said the protests by opposition parties,

especially PAS, following the move to issue the gambling licence was more politically motivated and not because of Islam.

"Even the DAP is protesting, as if the DAP too is supporting Islamic teachings. This is the politics of the opposition parties which are looking for issues (that will give them mileage).

"We have to separate politics from religion because for PAS, religion is a political tool for them," he said, *Bernama* reported.

The government had earlier reissued a licence to Ascot Sports Sdn Bhd to conduct sports

betting operations under very strict conditions. However, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who is also finance minister, had said the government had not



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finalised discussions on the terms and conditions for the licensing with the company concerned.

Malaysiakini, in its online report yesterday, had reported Mahathir's reply when asked if business tycoon Tan Sri Vincent Tan, who owns Ascot Sports, was one of those who had contributed to Umno's political funding.

He said: "He gave the money (from the sale of Ascot Sports) to the (Better Malaysia) foundation, (so) it is (meant) to be given to all Malaysians, not to Umno."

Tan had recently pledged to donate the RM525 million he would receive from the proposed sale of 70% of Ascot

Sports to Berjaya Corp to the Better Malaysia Foundation which runs charitable activities, including education for the needy.

In the Dewan Rakyat yesterday, backbencher Datuk Bung Moktar Radin (BN-Kinabatangan) urged the government to go ahead with its plan to legalise sports betting as the non-Malay community wanted it.

"It is common knowledge that football fans are placing their bets on games with underground bookies. It is a



Bung Moktar

billion ringgit business.

"There is nothing wrong with the government wanting to legalise sports betting and to obtain some revenue through taxes," he said when debating the 10th Malaysia Plan.

He noted that current opposition to the plan was centred around Muslim sentiment.

"I don't think this should be a problem. Just ban Muslims from taking part. We live in a multiracial society and we should take into consideration the feelings of the non-Muslims," he said as opposition members taunted him.