

NEW STRAITS TIMES

ESTABLISHED 1845

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER 27, 2011

Peninsular Malaysia RM1.20 Sabah and Sarawak RM1.80 Brunei B\$1.80 PP413/09/2011 (028690)



COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Datuk Seri Najib Razak being thanked by Genting chairman Tan Sri Lim Kok Thay after the prime minister launched the Community Chest education fund at SJKC Confucian in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. The Community Chest, which is to help upgrade vernacular and mission schools, will be funded primarily by profits of gaming company Pan Malaysian Pools Sdn Bhd, returns from its investments and public donations. — NST picture by Ghazali Bujang

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Community Chest for schools

By Eileen Ng
news@nst.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: A group of the country's top tycoons has set up an education foundation to help upgrade vernacular and mission schools in the country.

Launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, the Community Chest, modelled after Hong Kong's Community Chest, a non-profit organisation that funds community projects, helps schools that do not receive sufficient funding or aid from the government or the public.

The foundation will be funded primarily by the profits of gaming com-

pany Pan Malaysian Pools Sdn Bhd, returns from its investments and public donations.

It kick-started its programme by giving RM26.1 million to 61 schools yesterday, and pledged to channel a minimum of RM100 million annually from next year to help needy schools.

Among the tycoons involved were Genting Bhd chairman Tan Sri Lim Kok Thay, Hong Leong Financial Group Bhd chairman Tan Sri Quek Leng Chan, Lion Corp chairman Tan Sri William Cheng and businessman Tan Sri Chua Ma Yu.

Together with Genting's deputy chairman, Tun Mohammed Hanif Omar, social activist Tan Sri Lee Lam

Thye and Westports executive chairman Tan Sri G. Gnanalingam, the group sits on the foundation's board of trustees. In lauding the move, Najib said the fund was a "creative solution" to ensure quality education, adding that it would complement the government's effort to improve education in the country.

"We believe the future of Malaysia is in its people and the only way to develop the people is to ensure we are well-equipped with the right education, set of values and deep commitment," he said during the launch of the foundation at SJKC Confucian yesterday.

Najib said education was vital to

Malaysia's future and as such, it was imperative for people to understand that the education sector could only thrive if it was rooted within the community, as education based on government effort alone would not succeed.

"It has to be supported by parents, local community and the corporate sector who are willing to set aside some of their profits for the betterment of education."

Najib was also confident the fund would be run transparently.

"The funds will be distributed fairly with close consultation with the government, political parties and non-governmental organisations so that

everyone can see how the money is being distributed," Najib said, adding that it would be tax-exempted.

Later at a press conference, Lim said the Community Chest gave businessmen an opportunity to combine their charitable efforts and build up funds to support a sustainable long-term education programme to benefit the local communities.

He said the foundation would not only dole out funding, but would see through the upgrading and improvements of any school. There were also plans to provide scholarships to help deserving students.

For details, visit www.commchest.org.my