

Malaysia

Government not sidelining vernacular schools, says fund boss

By Shannon Teoh
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Najib (top) attends the Conference of Christian Mission Schools of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, June 27, 2009. — File pic

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 26 — Putrajaya has not neglected the interests of vernacular and mission schools, said the chairman of a newly-launched Community Chest, following Datuk Seri Najib Razak's announcement of at least RM100 million in yearly disbursements the private sector education fund today

Tan Sri Lim Kok Thay, who is also chairman of gambling giant Genting Bhd, told reporters today that "we are just here to fill the gap" as "it is impossible for the government to provide for all."

He also said the prime minister has given an assurance that public money for vernacular education will not be affected by th new initiative funded by profits from Pan Malaysian Pools' (PMP) gaming operations.

Although he earlier said that some school principals have been made to "look like beggars," Lim said "the government has a budget... you cannot say it is unlimited for vernacular or even government schools."

Earlier today, Najib launched the Community Chest fund run by a consortium of tycoons that paid over RM2 billion for tycoon T. Ananda Krishnan's Pan Malaysian Pools Sdn Bhd (PMP) in July.

He said PMP profits would be exempted from tax and would be distributed in close consultation with Barisan Nasional (BN) parties.

Lim clarified that all the profits from PMP would be handed over the Community Chest, which today pumped an initial RM26 million to 61 mainly vernacular schools today.

The government's cap on the number of state-funded vernacular schools has long been a source of dissatisfaction from the Chinese and Indian community.

While Bumiputeras enjoy extensive state support for education including financial grants, scholarships and enrolment quotas public universities, Chinese and Indian schools struggle each year to make ends meet.

The RM26 million handed out today comes after Najib gave RM1 million each to 15 Chinese schools in Penang yesterday.

Today, Lim also said funds handed out by the Community Chest should not be seen purely as gambling money as all parties were welcome to donate to the fund and mission schools have so far "received it with open arms."

Muslims are barred from gambling in Malaysia and consider profits from betting to be "haram (forbidden)".

When quizzed on whether national schools would also be allowed to apply for funds, Lim said that "we'll leave them to the government to continue... we are here to complement above and beyond the government's commitment."

Genting owns half of Jana Pendidikan Malaysia, the consortium that bought PMP in July.