

Malaysia

RM100m in annual gambling profits for education, says Najib

By Shannon Teoh

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Najib yesterday delivered RM15 million to Chinese schools in Penang. — File pic

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 26 — At least RM100 million a year from gambling profits will be channelled into vernacular and mission schools in “close consultation” with Barisan Nasional (BN) parties, Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today.

The prime minister said this when launching the “Community Chest” fund run by a consortium of tycoons that paid over RM2 billion for billionaire T. Ananda Krishnan’s Pan Malaysian Pools Sdn Bhd (PMP) in July.

The Putrajaya-backed education fund spearheaded by Tan Sri Lim Kok Tay of gambling giant Genting Berhad, pumped an initial RM26 million to 61 mainly vernacular schools today and pledged to channel a minimum of RM100 million annually beginning next year.

“The funds will be distributed in close consultation with the government... parties like MCA, Gerakan and MIC as well as NGOs... to ensure that it will be distributed fairly,” Najib said at SJK (C) Confucian this evening.

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.

But the new initiative, which will be exempted from tax, comes as the Chinese continue to shun national schools in favour of Chinese-language primary schools despite the lack of funding.

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

Najib, who is expected to call a general election within the year, has been tasked with reversing losses that denied BN its customary two-thirds majority of Parliament and five state governments.

The Singapore Straits Times reported in August that financial executives involved in the deal believe it could improve BN’s standing among Chinese and Indians who swung away from the ruling coalition in the landmark 2008 general election.

The prime minister added today that the “creative solution” would complement the government’s efforts to ensure access to quality education for all.

“We cannot meet all the needs of the community,” he said, but added that it was important that “new models” are initiated to “achieve what the government has targeted.”

The fund, which means “powering education” in English, is modelled after Hong Kong’s Community Chest, a non-profit organisation that funds community projects.

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

Besides chairman Lim, others on the board of trustees are Genting deputy chairman Tun Hanif Omar, Tan Sri Quek Leng Chan of the Hong Leong group, Lion Group boss Tan Sri William Cheng and Westports’ Tan Sri G. Gnanalingam.

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