

## **After arrests, Customs will answer GST queries**

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**By Yap Jia Hee**

After police arrested more than 80 activists who swarmed the Royal Malaysian Customs and Excise Department in Kelana Jaya, Selangor, on Monday with 106 posers on the looming Goods and Services Tax (GST), the department said today it will respond to all the questions.

"We will answer those questions. In the shortest time, we will compile all those questions including our answers and upload this on the Customs Department website," its Director-General Khazali Ahmad told a press conference in Putrajaya today.

Khazali said some questions posed by the activists were "too basic and simple".

"I don't know why they are asking them. One example is a question on whether the sales and services tax (SST) will continue when GST is implemented.

"We have explained, many times, that the GST will replace the SST," he said.

Nonetheless, Khazali added, his department will answer all questions as the information to be uploaded online will not only benefit the activists but also the general public.

More than 100 activists stormed the department complex on Monday, demanding answers to 106 GST-related questions.

This led to the arrest of at least 80 activists, after a stand-off with the police that lasted several hours.

### **'Easier route would be by writing letters'**

Khazali said the group should have taken the easier route of writing letters to the Customs Department to seek information, for the department is always prepared to provide information to any group or individuals, including through lectures.

"But if you gather and ask questions in a way that people say could lead to untoward incidents, why should we entertain groups like these?" he asked.

Nevertheless, Khazali (right) holds the opinion that the people are prepared to face GST when it is implemented on April 1, in place of the existing SST.

The Customs Department has in the meantime signed agreements with seven banks, designating them as GST collection agents.

These are RHB Bank, RHB Islamic Bank, Malayan Banking Bhd (Maybank), CIMB Bank,

Public Bank, Bank Islam, Alliance Bank and Hong Leong Bank.

Khazali said businesses and those registered for GST can pay the taxes over the bank counter at these banks, even by way of cash deposit machines and also through the banks' websites and the Connectivity Bank System.

Meanwhile, at a separate function, Deputy Finance Minister Chua Tee Yong told reporters that all over the world, it is normal for the GST scheme to face opposition when it is first introduced.

Despite the short-term challenges, Chua insisted, GST is a better tax scheme in the long run, and this can be seen when successive governments in the United Kingdom (UK) maintained a similar tax scheme after introducing it in 1973.

However, Chua (left) declined to comment on the Customs Department's conduct in facing the protesters outside its premises, saying he did not know how they approached the officers of the department that day.

"But some of these questions, as I understand, are questions that have already been answered. So I do not know whether these are real questions or just...

"If you are asking that same question, it is either you don't want to know, or I don't know the reason. I don't want to speculate," he said.

Chua said this at a press conference this afternoon, where he launched the GST Hand-Holding Workshop, which is a series of free workshops to help businesses comply with the new tax system.