

BN doesn't discriminate, Azalina tells MBs
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Newly-appointed Tourism Minister Azalina Othman Said refuted two Pakatan Rakyat chief ministers' claims that her ministry was punishing tourists by terminating its memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with the states.

During the launch of 'Colours and Flavours of Malaysia' at Kuala Lumpur today, Azalina said the accusations by Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng and Selangor Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim were unfair.

"This ministry will continue the projects as promised earlier. We do not make changes unnecessarily."

On the way the funds are channeled - instead of money going to the Pakatan state governments and it will now go to ministry-controlled committees - the minister said that it was the federal government's prerogative.

"It applies to all the states which is being led by opposition government. This has happened for the past few years with Kelantan and we've never discriminated as far as tourism projects are concerned. We've been very fair."

On whether opposition-held states will be left out of tourism projects, Azalina said the ministry will accept any proposals that is "in the interest of the people".

"But if they (opposition) decide to join Barisan Nasional, it would be much better," she said.

azalina tongkat ali promotion 080408"As far as we are concerned, the existing programmes will go on. We do not discriminate. I would like to inform Lim Guan Eng and Khalid Ibrahim that they must understand that the BN government doesn't discriminate in tourists programmes or tourists going to such programmes."

She cited the Penang Music Festival and Langkawi Water Festival as examples of plans which will go on whether the state is opposition-held or not.

On why her ministry is channeling the funds to a different committee and not the state Tourism Action Councils (TAC) like other BN-held states, Azalina said it was a "technical" matter.

Ministry to take over TACs

Tourism Ministry secretary-general Dr Victor Wee explained that there were two issues in the matter.

Firstly, TACs in the opposition states will no longer be headed by the state excos for tourism and will instead be led by him or a person appointed by the minister, he said.

"And second, is the way the funds will be channeled. The funds will no longer go through the states but through a federal mechanism. Because of the nature of the new political

scenario, the MOUs with the states will be cancelled.

"This, however, doesn't mean that the TACs or the state tourism offices will be closed. Activities will continue to be carried out at the state level and funds will continue to flow too."

Wee said that the state tourism councils, with a new chairman, will continue to bring all the stakeholders together to run the tourism programmes.

On whether the Pakatan state governments will have access to the funds, Azalina said: "The difference is who signs the cheque - they sign the cheques or we sign the cheques?"

"This is the federal government, so we sign the cheques. What's the big deal?"

She added that all the programmes were already planned and promoted overseas since last year and that they can't cancel them now, even if the states are run by opposition governments.

"The only changes we are making is the appointment new personalities in the tourism council. This is a federal policy which we have done in Kelantan, and we will do that for (all) the opposition-held states."

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