

'Full probe into tourist incident'

PM: Action will be taken against all involved if there were any inappropriate practices

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PETALING JAYA: Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has assured Malaysians that a thorough investigation into the recent incident involving a Chinese tourist will be done.

The Prime Minister said the matter would also be discussed in the upcoming Cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

"Action would be taken against all parties involved if any inappropriate practices were uncovered that could jeopardise Immigration operations.

"The level of security and operations at the national airport will always be improved to ensure that appropriate services are provided to all," he said after making a surprise visit to the Immigration and Customs counters at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) yesterday.

Anwar was commenting on the incident highlighted by Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing, who said a female Chinese tourist had claimed she was held up when entering Malaysia and was asked to pay to secure her release.

On Saturday, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) chief commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki said it would launch a probe

into allegations of corruption.

During his visit, Anwar said operations at the country's entry points could be improved.

"I found there is room for improvement to strengthen operations at the country entry points," he said.

He also said he took the opportunity to witness first-hand the issues or problems arising during daily operations involving tourists, foreigners, and Malaysians.

"I visited the airport, the Customs Department, and the Immigration Department there.

"Everything is under control, and there are a few things at the Customs Department that we should repair," he said.

Noting that a majority of officers and staff conducted their duties smoothly, Anwar said there were "only a few" problems that warranted an investigation for further improvement.

"I studied the measures taken so far and can see that the Immigration has responded positively.

"What we identified were several small fractions that were still unable to see changes, including facing allegations.

"God willing, we will investigate thoroughly," he said.

When contacted, Tiong's office said the minister would not comment further to allow the authorities to investigate the matter.



Spot check: Anwar making a surprise visit to the Immigration and Customs counters at Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

When asked about a purported incident report that has been circulating, a source who spoke on the condition of anonymity said that the Immigration Department had not lodged a police report as of press time.

The source said it was not a police report as reported by some media portals.

"It was also not an official statement by the department.

"Those can only come from the Immigration director-general or be posted on their official media pages," said the source.

Earlier, a viral message about an alleged internal report on the incident had made its rounds on social media.

As of press time, efforts to contact the Immigration director-general to verify the report's authenticity were ongoing.

When contacted, Malaysian Association of Tours and Travel Agents (MATTA) president Datuk Tan Kok Liang expressed gratitude for Anwar's surprise visit to KLIA.

"The visit will surely make the relevant agencies at the airport

more alert and adhere to the standard operating guidelines.

"It will boost public confidence and signal to stakeholders, including foreign tourists, that the government is seriously concerned about the exposure and that unformed officers found guilty will be punished.

"We look forward to the investigation and findings to put an end to this unfortunate incident," he said.

Tan said MATTA has, on several occasions, raised concerns about Immigration officers' misconduct as it impedes tourism and the country's image.

"There is nothing new about reports of corruption and victimisation of tourists by Immigration officers. These incidents involve tourists from many countries, not just China."

Tan said a thorough, independent and transparent investigation is necessary into the alleged misconduct.

Moving forward, Tan said he hoped for new measures and a check and balance mechanism to be put in place to protect foreign travellers coming into Malaysia.