

Royal sting on graft

King sweetens anti-corruption efforts with honey gesture

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PUTRAJAYA: In a compelling show of determination to stamp out corruption, His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, presented a bottle of honey to the country's top graft buster, Tan Sri Azam Baki.

In a Facebook post, Sultan Ibrahim reaffirmed that fighting corruption, the country's number one enemy, will be a major focus during his reign.

"As I emphasised before, my honeymoon is over; now go catch the bees," His Majesty said while handing over the honey to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission's (MACC) chief commissioner to symbolise the end of the "honeymoon" period.

Sultan Ibrahim granted a 30-minute audience to Azam at Istana Negara in Kuala Lumpur yesterday to discuss the latest developments in the enforcement agency.

On the same morning, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the RM2bil leakage in government revenue caused by the corrupt practices of certain Customs Department officers at KLIA Cargo shows that graft must not be trivialised.

Anwar, who expressed disappointment over the case, said although it involved only a small section of the Customs Department, the estimated losses were massive.

"We are doing all we can to curb corruption and power abuse. Although we scored several wins, there are still cases, such as the latest one involving the Customs Department.

"I am affected and saddened by this, as the department is under the Finance Ministry," he said at the Prime Minister's Department monthly gathering here yesterday.

The Prime Minister said corruption must be taken seriously and all efforts must be made towards stopping the menace.

"Those who trivialise corruption should look at the amount of



On the go: Anwar attending a development briefing meeting at the Perlis State Assembly Complex in Kangar. — ZHAFARAN NASIB/The Star

loss it causes. In this (Customs) case, it is RM2bil.

"If we act on leakages, including those due to the smuggling of diesel and cooking oil, we can save billions of ringgit," added Anwar.

Over the past week, MACC has arrested 34 Customs officers assigned to KLIA Cargo in connection with smuggling activities that are believed to have caused revenue leakage of RM2bil over the past two years.

The suspects were arrested in a special operation codenamed Ops Samba 2.0 carried out by MACC, the Inland Revenue Board and Bank Negara Malaysia.

Investigators believe that the officers received RM4.7mil from a syndicate to facilitate the smuggling of chewable tobacco, cigarettes, liquor, health products and vehicle spare parts over the past few years.

The Prime Minister said he has been focusing on governance issues since the beginning of his administration in order to ensure that the country is run effectively and that public funds are used appropriately.

"There are some who are of the opinion that we need to reduce controversy (on governance and corruption), but I believe that we must be firm and have the discipline to uphold integrity," he said.

Anwar also said fiscal responsibility and financial management among civil servants, especially department heads, are important to reduce the country's deficit.

He said the government decided to have a dedicated law on fiscal responsibility to ensure transparency and accountability.

"With the Act in place, it will help boost investor confidence in the country," he added.

The Public Finance and Fiscal

Responsibility Act, which spells out the responsibilities of the government in terms of governance, transparency in managing public finances, and fiscal risks, especially in relation to revenue, expenditure loans, and debts, was passed in October last year.

According to the fiscal objectives of the Act, the annual development expenditure should not be more than 3% of the gross domestic product (GDP), the government debt level should not be more than 60% of the GDP, the fiscal deficit should be at 35% or less, and government guarantees should not exceed 25% of GDP.

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