

New agency to face tourist influx

PM: Setup of single authority helps smoothen passage, counter smuggling

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PUTRAJAYA: The recent congestion and delays at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport counters have caught the attention of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The Prime Minister said the Immigration Department had been reprimanded over the issue as it involved tourists arriving in the country.

"Sometimes our reprimands are akin to parental love, so please don't take it to heart. As with the Hari Raya spirit of forgiveness, I hope the Immigration Department will forgive me," said Anwar at the Home Ministry's Hari Raya Aidilfitri open house here yesterday.

He said the number of tourist arrivals had increased drastically

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Anwar Ibrahim

at the beginning of the year, resulting in pressure at Immigration counters.

"Malaysia is a popular destination, and there was an influx of tourist arrivals of up to 80%, which put pressure on the agency.

"However, if forced to wait,

tourists will not tolerate any excuses for delays," he added.

As such, Anwar said the recently formed Malaysia Checkpoints and Border Agency (MCBA) will help smoothen the entry of tourists into the country.

The MCBA, which commenced operations on May 1, will serve as a single agency to oversee the management and control of the nation's borders.

Although the law on MCBA's operations will only be tabled in the coming Dewan Rakyat meeting in July, Anwar said the agency has started operating based on existing laws governing the relevant border authorities.

On another matter, Anwar said the announcement of the civil service pay hike has nothing to do with the coming Kuala Kubu Baru by-election.

"They (Opposition) say it's

because of Kuala Kubu Baru, but the decision was made early this year, way before the passing of the Kuala Kubu Baharu assemblyman.

"I had also mentioned that we would announce the policies under the civil service remuneration scheme," he said.

On Labour Day, the Prime Minister announced a pay rise of more than 13%, including a minimum pay of RM2,000 for civil servants under the Public Service Remuneration System (SSPA), which is to take effect in December.

Although the announcement of a pay increase under SSPA was well received by civil servants, Anwar said there was bound to be criticism of the government.

Among the criticisms, he noted, was that the salary hike was not the highest under the SSPA as

announced, and it has yet to get approval from Parliament.

"In fact, the pay rise for those in the lower category will be between 20% and almost 40% for most civil servants.

"This is because our system has to be equitable. Those in the higher ranking will see a hike that's less than those in the lower grade," he said.

Anwar said the Opposition MPs will not dare oppose the SSPA when it is tabled in Parliament.

"Which MP will want to object to the new remuneration scheme? If he does, we will throw him out in the next general election," he said.

Anwar said the salary hike is justified in light of the increase in workload over the last 12 years without any adjustments, particularly for those in frontline agencies.