

FAM FIASCO

NO COVER-UP OF FINDINGS, VOWS ANWAR

But PM stresses that due process is needed first before any action can be taken



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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim made it clear there will be no cover-up in findings against the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) over the falsification of documents involving seven naturalised players, which led to its sanction by world governing body FIFA.

His pledge comes on the back of a proposal by Youth and Sports Minister Hannah Yeoh that future applications for naturalised players be assessed first by the National Sports Council (NSC).

Anwar said FIFA's indictment of FAM was not something to be taken lightly, acknowledging that it had become a major issue.

"Yes, it is a major issue. The government has deliberated on it and there will be no cover-up. I can understand people are impatient and they want immediate action, but you must let it go through the usual process."

He likened public impatience over the FAM scandal to the reaction sparked by viral videos alleging corrupt practices by certain individuals in Sabah, where the government was accused of dragging its feet to act against those involved.

However, he said, people failed to understand that due process was needed before any action could be taken.

On the issue of bringing in naturalised players to get instant results, Anwar said the best option would be to develop local talent.

He said it could not be denied that sports fans sometimes demanded immediate results.

"I am also a sports fan. Ideally, we should develop local talent and we have disbursed funds for this purpose, but it will take time to get the results that everyone is craving for."

On Tuesday, FIFA's appeal committee upheld sanctions against FAM and ordered a formal probe into its internal processes.

The case centred on forged documents submitted for seven naturalised players, namely Gabriel Palmero, Facundo Garces, Rodrigo Holgado, Imanol Machuca, Joao Figueiredo, Jon Irazabal and Hector Hevel.

FIFA investigators found that documents submitted by FAM stated the players' grandparents were born in Malaysian territories. However, civil records obtained from Spain, Argentina, Brazil and the Netherlands showed otherwise.

The appeal committee rejected claims by FAM and the players that they acted in good faith.

In September, the FIFA disciplinary committee fined FAM 350,000 Swiss francs (about RM1.9 million). The seven players were each fined 2,000 Swiss francs and banned from football-related activities for 12 months.

Yeoh, in the Dewan Rakyat on Thursday, proposed tighter vetting of naturalised players and a formal oversight role for the sports commissioner to ensure that the investigation into FAM, led by Tun Md Raus Sharif, leads to real reform.

She addressed the systemic gap that allowed questionable naturalisations to proceed.

She proposed that all future applications to naturalise foreign-born athletes be vetted first by the NSC before being sent to the Home Ministry.

"We want naturalisation based on sporting merit, not shortcuts."

On the probe into FAM, Yeoh said reforms based on the report must be implemented to prevent a recurrence.