

Putting the law above all else

In KL signboard language issue, minister says by-laws should prevail over nation's tourism interests



Churchill Edward

Churchilledward@theborneopost.com

KUCHING: The rule of law must take precedence over tourism interests in determining the languages used on signboards across Malaysia, said Dato Sri Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah.

Weighing in on Kuala Lumpur City Hall's (DBKL) recent enforcement against business signboards not in the Malay language, the Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts Minister said the usage of signboard languages depends on the respective city's by-laws which its residents must abide by.

"Just because we want to attract tourists from India, (does that mean) we must use Tamil on the signboards?"

"If the by-law says we must have only Malay language, then Malay language it is. If the by-law says we can have Malay, English and Mandarin, then all three languages can be used.

"This matter should not be made into an issue, escalating from a trivial matter to raising major concerns," he told a press conference at his office here yesterday.

Federal Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing had on Sunday criticised DBKL's enforcement against Chinese-language signboards, remarking that it could tarnish Malaysia's image as a diverse and multicultural nation.

Tiong, who is Bintulu MP and Dudong assemblyman, said the controversial action had created a negative perception among some international tourists, who had asked him whether Malaysia was a 'racist and religiously extreme' country.

This, he added, would have a direct effect on their decision to visit Malaysia and could impact



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Dato Sri Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah

the Visit Malaysia Year 2026 campaign.

Abdul Karim argued that the use of dual languages on road and business signage is not the main consideration of tourists visiting Malaysia.

"I think it will not significantly impact travellers but rather be a minor inconvenience. There is no need to go overboard."

He said in Sarawak, it is acceptable for Malay and English to be utilised as languages for signboards, as the two are the official languages of the state.

"Not a problem for dual languages to be used in signboards in Sarawak – big letters in Malay on top with the English translations underneath.

"It would be good to have dual-language signage; we only utilise the official languages of the state," he said.

Since October, DBKL has issued enforcement notices to premises in the capital for failing to display signboards in Malay, citing the Small Advertising Act (FA) 1982.