

29 SEP, 2024

## No customary boss

Sunday Star, Malaysia



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## On the beat

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DATUK Anis Rizana Mohd Zainudin has become somewhat of a legend among the staff of the Royal Malaysian Customs Department (JKDM), although it's been only a year since she took over the post of director-general.

The country's first woman Customs chief is known for her strict approach and compliance management.

Accompanied by just her special officer and a bodyguard, she still continues to find time to make regular spot checks to ensure her orders are being carried out.

There is no accompanying entourage and certainly no pre-announced alerts to the branches.

Her first such check was on Sept 27, 2023 – two days after her appointment – when she turned up at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport to see for herself the workflow of her officers. She had not even received her uniform at that time and most of the startled officers did not even recognise her. Some were not even aware of her appointment.

Anis Rizana faced her first test when she immediately had to deal with a high-profile case that went viral – the seizure of 622kg of methamphetamine by the Australian Border Force from Malaysia to Australia on Oct 12, 2023, which is one of the largest cases ever in history.

"From that moment, I realised the challenge I had ahead: to build a strong team capable of fulfilling the responsibility of revenue collection, providing trade facilitation, and effectively safeguarding the borders with efficiency, agility, and integrity," she said.

Anis Rizana declared openly very early in her job that she would not protect officers or personnel found guilty of corruption and abusing their power for personal gain, describing these offences as "unforgivable".

At the top of her agenda is corruption. She said corruption has not only tarnished the country's image and reputation but also affected other staff who are honest and dedicated.

In June, three Customs officers



**Customs legend:** The feisty Anis Rizana is known for her strict approach and compliance management. — Bernama

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**Malaysia's first woman Customs chief Datuk Anis Rizana Mohd Zainudin shows that she is one extraordinary lady.**



Anis Rizana accompanying Finance Minister II Datuk Seri Amir Hamzah Azizan to inspect the AI-equipped baggage scanner at KLIA Terminal 1 recently. — Bernama

were arrested with several million in cash during a probe by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), relating to smuggling activities in Port Klang. It's a blot when other honest officers put their lives on the line while on duty.

In June, smugglers had fired at a Customs officer along the Thai border in Kelantan. We still haven't forgotten the late deputy director-general Datuk Shahruddin Ibrahim who was gunned down in Putrajaya in 2013 following a probe into car smuggling activities in Langkawi.

One year later, Anis Rizana has

earned herself a reputation, and her stripes, but continues to make spot checks.

One officer told this writer: "Her pictures are now everywhere and, in one case, even on the screen of an officer's desktop. No one wants to be caught unaware."

He said those who asked her indifferently who she was must possibly be still reeling from shock. Anyone meeting this feisty Ipoh-born woman would immediately notice one thing – she talks very fast.

She acts fast too, as the media and officials can verify. She starts

Terminal 2, Selangor, and Johor."

The Customs Department has also acquired enforcement operation vehicles – 28 Isuzu D-Max vehicles were allocated, 19 for use by the Enforcement Operations Branch, and nine for the K9 and Drug Detection Dog Units nationwide.

To further enhance the department's effectiveness in curbing drug smuggling activities, 20 new drug detection dogs have been deployed across Malaysia.

Her first-year accolades included the Customs Department achieving a major success with the seizure of 15 containers containing 150.26 million cigarettes, 30 tonnes of tobacco, and 32.5 tonnes of plastic waste, valued at RM118.18mil. This was the largest seizure made by Customs this year.

Then, there is the success of the Enforcement Division, which handled 5,196 cases as of Aug 31, with the value of seized goods, including duties/taxes, amounting to RM1.25bil.

This represents a 42.47% increase from the RM884.26mil for the same period in 2023. According to the recent Illicit Cigarettes Study report, the presence of counterfeit cigarettes in the market showed a decline from 56.4% – almost six of every 10 cigarettes in the market being fake – at the beginning of the year to 54.8% in May.

Bernama also reported that the total revenue collection of the Customs Department has reached RM41.68bil as of Aug 31 this year, far higher than the RM36.13bil for the same period last year.

"This is a remarkable achievement, and it shows that JKDM is on the right track," said Anis Rizana in the *Ruang Bicara* programme produced by Bernama TV recently. "[Our] strategy has yielded results."

Commenting on this year's revenue collection target, she expressed confidence that Customs will be able to achieve the RM56bil target set by the Finance Ministry.

In the past year, the department managed to collect revenue of RM55.1bil, some 3% higher than the projected rate.

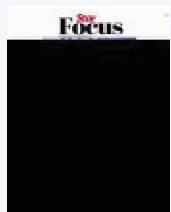
The Customs department has an unusual role – it enforces laws, collects indirect taxes, and facilitates international trade. Other enforcement agencies like the police don't have to worry about revenue targets.

But the department needs to beef up its manpower to stay effective.

As at Aug 31, its total number of staff members was 14,139 – a small number indeed for a department with such huge responsibilities.

It could also lose over 5,000 staff members to the newly-created Malaysian Border Control and Protection Agency under the purview of the Home Ministry.

But the serving Customs officers, especially the men, are getting accustomed to a tough talking and tough acting lady boss.



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### SUMMARIES

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