

**Zahid: Foreign masterminds cheating illegal immigrants**  
**MalaysiaKini.com**  
**Dec 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi revealed that there are agents and syndicates who cheat illegals and are living in luxury.

Ahmad Zahid, who is also home minister, said he had proof that there were agents and syndicates masterminded by foreign nationals who were cheating the illegal immigrants and were currently living luxuriously and even being awarded the title of 'datuk seri.'

As such, he said he had directed the Immigration Department so that enforcement activities to nab illegal immigrants were also focused on the agents and syndicates bringing them in.

"Enforcement operations found 95 percent of illegal immigrants entering the country had valid documents but in the end fell victims to the agents and syndicates. Most of the victims of the agents and syndicates were from Bangladesh, Indonesia and Myanmar.

"We find almost 95 percent of illegal immigrants coming to this country had valid documents but became illegals to stay here as their documents were either held by the agents or syndicates. There are also employers who kept their travel documents and work permits," he said.

He said this at a media conference after opening the 2015 Immigration Day Celebration in Miri today.

Also present were Sarawak Social Development Minister representing the Sarawak chief minister, William Mawan Ikom, Rural and Regional Development Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob, Deputy Home Ministers Nur Jazlan and Masir Kujat, and Immigration Department director-general Mustafa Ibrahim.

Commenting further, Ahmad Zahid said he had directed the Immigration Department director-general, via the enforcement division, aided by the Royal Malaysian Police and Department of Volunteers Malaysia to conduct full enforcement.

"I want the Immigration Department to focus not only on nabbing illegals but also to seek, investigate, arrest and take to court the agents and syndicates involved," he said.

Ahmad Zahid also said that heavier punishments would be meted out if the agents and syndicates involved were found guilty.

"The Immigration Act 1959 is heavy enough, but if the people want the act to be strengthened and its penalties increased, the Home Ministry is prepared to do it.

"I will discuss with my two deputies and the ministry's secretary-general to seek legal advice to strengthen the act and existing regulations," he added.

- *Bernama*

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Source: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/323932>