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'I'll be DPM for all M'sians'

Zahid brushes off perception that he would act with an iron fist

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PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who is known for his tough guy image, has brushed off the perception that "He would act with an iron fist as the new Deputy Prime Minister but would be firm as well as fair."

He said he would remain the same determined person that he had always been, especially in the war against crime and terrorism.

Speaking to *The Star* in his first exclusive interview with the media since he was appointed last Tuesday, Dr Ahmad Zahid, who is Home Minister, said he wanted to be regarded as the Deputy Prime Minister for all Malaysians.

"I fight for the interest of the Malays and Islam. That doesn't mean that I do not look after the interest of other races or religions. I hold on to the teachings of the Quran which tells us to respect other religions if we want Islam to be respected," he said.

Dr Ahmad Zahid, 62, said he would be "colour blind" in his job as Home Minister, adding that those who committed crimes would not escape just because they were of a certain race.

"I may be smiling but I am firm. I do not compromise. There will be no warnings against criminals. I will do this because this is what is expected of me as Home Minister. People want the streets to be free of crime and for the country to be safe so that they can sleep soundly at

Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi biodata

- Born on Jan 4, 1953
- From Bagan Datoh, Perak
- Served as a political secretary to Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who was the then Culture, Youth and Sports Minister and Defence Minister between 1987 and 1993
- Served as a Senator between 1991 and 1994
- Elected as Member of Parliament for Bagan Datoh in 1995
- Served as Deputy Tourism Minister from 2004 to 2006
- Served as Deputy Information Minister from 2006 to 2008
- Served as a Minister in the Prime Minister's Department from 2008 to 2009
- Appointed as Defence Minister in 2009
- Appointed as Home Minister on May 16, 2013
- Appointed as Deputy Prime Minister on July 28, 2015

night. I am committed to deliver this," he said.

Dr Ahmad Zahid was wearing a multi-hued batik shirt when he walked into his office at the Home Ministry on Thursday.

He was his usual friendly self asking us how and where we celebrated Hari Raya and apologised for not replying to our congratulatory text messages.

He said there was an endless stream of such messages from family members, friends and even from people whom he did not know.

The Star had requested the interview as soon as his appointment was announced but he said he did not have the time then. To compensate for this, he spoke to *The Star* for about 45 minutes, half an hour longer than the 15 minutes allocated for each media.

Among the first areas of Dr Ahmad Zahid's focus would be wiping out the scourge of illegal gambling, which he described as a "menace that destroys families".

"If families are destroyed, what is

left of a society? There is no religion which condones gambling.

"I have instructed all state police chiefs to launch a crackdown against operators of illegal gambling premises. I have given them until end of the year to bring down the numbers. Ideally, I want to see zero illegal gambling activities in the country," he said.

He said fighting the Islamic State and the re-radicalisation of militants would be another key area of his attention.

"Other countries are looking at us as one of the more successful examples of rehabilitating militants and have asked us to share our experiences.

"Tighting IS has been my priority as Home Minister. Now, as DPM, it has become an even bigger priority," he added.

On him being branded as an 'ultra Malay', Dr Ahmad Zahid said: "I believe the perception is because I am vocal and steadfast in championing my race and religion.

"I'm carrying the struggle of my

party. What people fail to see is that I fight for fairness and justice for all Malaysians too, which I intend to continue doing."

Dr Ahmad Zahid, who has a rocky relationship with online portals, said that he understood and respected the role of the media.

"Even if they are not fair to me, the portals must learn to respect the decisions I make on any issue," he said.

The Deputy Prime Minister said action would be taken against those who spread malicious lies, like stories spread on Wednesday that his predecessor Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin would be arrested by the police.

Zahid, who described the lies as *jahat*, said he called the Attorney-General and the Inspector-General of Police to confirm that the story was "utter rubbish".

"I called Tan Sri (Muhyiddin) personally at 2am to assure him and his wife that the police were not coming after them. In my second call to him, I again told Tan Sri that he could have a peaceful sleep and also to inform Puan Sri Norainee (Muhyiddin's wife) to stop crying because she feared that Muhyiddin would be arrested," he said.

By the time the interview ended, there was a rather long line of visitors for their turn to meet Dr Ahmad Zahid, among whom was United States Amhassador to Malaysia Joseph Yun.

