

Visa-Free Travel does not Compromise on Security - Zahid

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BEIJING, Feb 2 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will not compromise on the question of security despite its decision to attract more tourists from China with visa-free travel, said Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

He said the government ensured that security would not be undermined with the visa-free travel facility extended to Chinese nationals visiting Malaysia for less than 15 days.

"This issue was discussed at a working group meeting during the visit to Kuala Lumpur of China's Minister of Public Security Guo Shengkun.

"The Chinese authorities, especially the police and immigration, will provide us with a list of suspects and their biometric details. Travel documents and names can be changed but not thumbprints," he said.

Ahmad Zahid, who is also the home minister, spoke to Malaysian reporters after a visit today to the one-stop centre here that handles visa for Chinese nationals travelling to Malaysia.

Ahmad Zahid began a four-day visit to China yesterday, his first as deputy prime minister.

He said the purpose of the visit was to focus on three matters - the visa-free travel for visits of less than 15 days, transnational crimes and modern policing systems as well as efforts to combat terrorism.

When announcing a recalibrated Budget 2016 recently, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak had said that Chinese nationals visiting Malaysia for less than 15 days would not have to obtain a visa.

Ahmad Zahid had follow-up discussions on transnational crimes and modern policing systems with the Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission of the Community Party of China, Meng Jiangzhu, and Guo.

He also said that focus was given to efforts to combat terrorism so as to prevent Malaysia from becoming a transit point to third countries for suspects on the list provided by China.

"These three elements are vital if visa-free travel is implemented. It must be ensured that there are no transnational crimes and terrorism activities.

"While we (Malaysia) want tourists to come, the security aspect must be looked into so that Malaysia's liberal measure to draw tourists does not prove to be detrimental to the two countries," he said.

According to Najib's announcement, Chinese nationals visiting Malaysia for less than 15 days at any time between March 1 and Dec 31 this year would not need a visa.

Ahmad Zahid said the tour agency handling the visa would be penalised by the immigration authorities and Tourism and Culture Ministry for any irregularity.

The agency could be fined and deregistered as a body permitted to bring Chinese tourists to Malaysia, he said, adding that there had been social problems and unregistered marriages when the visa-on-arrival facility was extended before to tourists from China.

The measure is an attempt to attract eight million tourists, with spending power of RM22.1 billion, from China annually over the next five years compared to the present 1.3 million.

Ahmad Zahid said Malaysia was an attractive destination for Chinese tourists, and Malaysian authorities should do what they could to facilitate their visit.

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