

## **Changing Geopolitics Demands Greater Engagement and Inclusivity upon ASEAN - Ahmad Zahid**

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KUALA LUMPUR, April 19 (Bernama) -- ASEAN now has become a strategic interest of the major powers and this demands greater engagement and inclusivity on regional defense and security, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

He said ASEAN should play a proactive role as the primary driving force in facing this challenge whilst adapting to the dynamics and changes in the security environment.

"Malaysia and ASEAN member states are strong believers of multilateral engagement.

"I am sure such effective and close cooperation is vital to spawn the ability to identify and address threats of any sort which may be detrimental to regional security and stability," he said when delivering his closing remarks at the Putrajaya Forum 2016 here today.

Ahmad Zahid said ASEAN was well recognized as a platform for maintaining regional peace and stability and has continued to engage regional and extra- regional powers constructively.

Malaysia has always advocated the importance of multilateralism and regional cooperation as well as networks of diplomatic relationships, which spans across the globe to collectively address emerging security challenges.

He said there were still several security issues such as geopolitics which remained a challenge in the region's efforts to ensure continued peace and stability.

"The geopolitics of the region is also changing rapidly with competing interests of major powers contesting for primacy in this part of the world.

"The importance of the maritime realm of South East Asia that hosts strategic and vital sea lanes, the Strait of Melaka and the South China Sea, will continue to attract attention and interest," he said.

As such, ASEAN would have to continue to keep adjusting itself, revisit and enhance its capacities and capabilities with the changing times, he added.

The forum was held in conjunction with the four-day exhibition and conferences of the Defence Services Asia 2016, which gathers industry players from 60 countries, as well as trade visitors from 77 countries.

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