

**Do Not Drag Families of Kidnapped Victims into Sarawak Election, DPM Tells DAP**  
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JULAU, April 26 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi cautioned the DAP against dragging the families of four kidnapped victims from Sibul, into politics, during the Sarawak state election.

Ahmad Zahid who attended a gathering with RELA members at Rh.Margretta Tujang (Margretta Tujang long house) in Karangan Buloh here today said they were being featured in the opposition's 'ceramah' as if the government or the police was not doing anything to secure their release.

"The DAP is capitalizing on the matter. This is not something that it should do to aggravate the emotion of the families. The truth is efforts are ongoing to secure their release. We are in talks with the Philippine authorities and the militant groups involved in the kidnapping," he said.

He said in fact senior police officers who were in Manila for the purpose had just returned last night.

On April 1, four crew members of a Malaysian boat were kidnapped by an armed group at about midnight while they were passing through near Ligitan Island in Semporna, Sabah.

Ahmad Zahid said the families should have confidence in the government's efforts to try to bring them back.

"This will take time. We are not dealing with the Philippine authorities alone but the 'kidnap for ransom' group. The incident too happened in international waters and we just cannot simply encroach there. If it happened in our waters and within the ESSCom jurisdiction, we can act right away," he said.

He added that the DAP knew about it but were still manipulating the issue to suit their interest.

Ahmad Zahid said no political parties should capitalize on the issue as it was a non-political matter, adding that it was in fact a sensitive matter.

"I am afraid any unnecessary manipulation will negate our efforts to negotiate and to seek their release. The DAP should be held responsible if any untoward incident happened to the victims," he said.

On the purported demand of RM4 million sought by the kidnappers from the family members as ransom, Ahmad Zahid said it was also a sensitive matter.

That DAP is prepared to use any issues to further their cause, it should be a cause for concern for Sarawakians, he said.

Ahmad Zahid also said RELA members in the state should show their appreciation to the state government

He said there were 341,551 RELA members statewide and 35 per cent of them were registered voters.

Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Anthnony Nogeh Gumbek, Julau Member of Parliament Datuk Joseph Salang Gandum and Barisan Nasional Candidate for Meluan, Roland Duat Jubin were also present at the gathering.

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