

**Home Ministry Intensifies Malaysia-Thailand Border Control - Ahmad Zahid  
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PASIR MAS, Aug 19 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi today said that the Home Ministry will continue intensifying control over Malaysia-Thailand border crossings, especially in Kelantan, to combat smuggling.

Ahmad Zahid, who is also Home Minister, said there were approximately 10,000 security forces personnel stationed at border areas right now to combat the smuggling of persons, firearms and drugs.

"Prior to this, there were only 997 members of Anti-Smuggling Unit (now known as Malaysian Border Security Agency (Aksem)) at border areas, but now, there are 10,000 members.

"I have (also) mobilised members of the General Operations Force, with one team taking turns every month (for the purpose)," he said at the Leader-Meets-People programme and the opening of Rantau Panjang UMNO delegates' meeting at Kolej Kemahiran Tinggi MARA here today.

Approximately 15,000 people attended the programme, including Kelantan UMNO Liaison Committee chairman Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed and his deputy Datuk Ahmad Jazlan Yaakob, Rantau Panjang UMNO chief Senator Datuk Abdullah Mat Yassin, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Senator Datuk Dr Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki and Kelantan Federal Development Department director Datuk Makhtar Mustapha.

Ahmad Zahid said the standard operating procedures (SOP) for each permanent staff of Aksem had also been improved by transferring them once in every three months to prevent them from forging ties with smugglers.

The deputy prime minister said many quarters had questioned the level of security in border areas without knowing the difficulties faced by the government in implementing the tasks.

"Our border covers a distance of 776 kilometres. Some say why can't we have a wall or fence, but the problem is that the smugglers will cut it," he said.

Meanwhile, he also advised residents in border areas to give priority in hiring local workers instead of foreigners in a bid to prevent smuggling activities from being rampant.

"If we deem this our home, then we should prioritise on hiring local workers. Any jobs must be given to our own people, and don't go working with the smugglers," he added.

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