

Malaysia Determined to get Upgraded to Tier One of U.S Watch List

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From Ahmad Fuad Yahya

LONDON, Nov 7 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is intensifying efforts to increase the number of prosecutions and convictions in cases of human trafficking or modern slavery through close cooperation with the International Police (Interpol) and ASEAN National Police (ASEANAPOL) and exchange of intelligence information.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said these efforts were in line with the aspiration to improve Malaysia's position from the current Tier Two to Tier One in the United States (U.S) Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Watch List.

"We have been at Tier Two for two consecutive years and by 2020, we are determined to be upgraded to Tier One," he told the Malaysian media here today.

Also present was Malaysian High Commissioner to United Kingdom (UK) Datuk Ahmad Rasidi Hazizi.

Ahmad Zahid is here for a five-day working visit, which began today.

He said he would also discuss the matter with the UK Home Secretary Amber Rudd during their meeting, scheduled for Wednesday.

The upgrading of Malaysia's position to Tier One in the Watch List could expedite the approval for Malaysia's application to have visa-free entry to the U.S.

Ahmad Zahid said, prior to this, Malaysia had been facing problems to increase the number of perpetrators (in human trafficking cases) being brought to justice as not many people would appear as witnesses for the prosecution.

"The main problem faced by the prosecution in tackling cases of human trafficking is to get the key witnesses to attend the court proceedings.

"This is mainly linked to the existence of the global networking of traffickers," he said.

The deputy prime minister said, at present, the U.S found that even though the number of suspects in human trafficking cases arrested in Malaysia had risen to over 100 people, the

number of those prosecuted and convicted was still small, and because of that, Malaysia was seen as 'not so serious' in tackling the problem.

As such, he said discussions had been held with the Attorney-General's Chambers to find the best methods to increase the number of prosecutions and convictions of the suspects.

So far, he said more than 30 suspects were charged with the offence and 50 others would be charged next year, including 10 who were extradited from Thailand on suspicion of involvement in the mass burial of victims of human trafficking in Wang Kelian, Perlis, last year.

Ahmad Zahid said UK and Malaysia had a mutual interest in human trafficking issue, which is also called modern slavery, and it was made clear during his meeting with British Prime Minister Theresa May at the recent United Nations General Assembly in New York.

He said a more comprehensive effort should be done, especially after efforts taken by the United Nations High Commission For Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organisation For Migration (IOM) to tackle the problem met a dead end.

The issue of modern slavery not only mattered in the European countries, but also in the ASEAN countries, especially Malaysia, which is among the popular destinations for foreign workers, he said.

Meanwhile, Ahmad Zahid began his visit today with a meeting with Digital Barriers, a leading company in security equipment and software and global intelligence.

He also visited the Belmarsh Prison here and is scheduled to attend a dinner with Captains of Industry in the United Kingdom later.

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