

**Zakir Naik has Malaysian PR, says home minister**  
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**Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi says government will assist if any request for mutual legal assistance comes from Indian authorities.**

PETALING JAYA: Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi today admitted that controversial Islamic preacher Zakir Naik has permanent resident (PR) status in Malaysia.

Zahid, who is also home minister, said the Indian national had been given his Malaysian PR more than five years ago, adding that it was issued before his time in charge of the ministry.

Zahid was appointed home minister in the new cabinet announced by Prime Minister Najib Razak after Barisan Nasional won the last general election (GE13) in May 2013. He took over from Hishammuddin Hussein, who is now defence minister and a special functions minister.

Asked if Malaysia was helping Indian authorities in their investigations into the Islamic Research Foundation (IRF) founder on money laundering charges, Zahid said it was not necessary.

“There is nothing for us to investigate. That needs to be done by the Indian authorities themselves.

“However, we will give our cooperation should a request for mutual legal assistance (MLA) come from the Indian authorities, provided there is a relevant agreement between both countries on such cooperation,” Zahid told reporters after launching the Human Ecology International Conference 2017 at the Dorsett Hotel in Putrajaya today.

He added that there was also no question of extraditing Naik to India as the process needs to be carried out with proper direction through the relevant diplomatic channels.

Zahid’s announcement will not come as a surprise to many, especially Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) chairman P Waythamoorthy, who had threatened legal action against Putrajaya in February if the government refused to disclose whether the preacher had obtained PR status in Malaysia.

Waytha was reported on Feb 2 as saying that he had information that Naik had been granted permanent resident status under the sponsorship of a prominent individual.

Reports of Naik having been given PR or possibly citizenship in Malaysia first emerged last November when the Hindustan Times said that the controversial preacher was made a citizen of Malaysia.

Reporting that Naik was in hiding in Malaysia to escape investigation in India, the Hindustan Times said that authorities, who had thought he was hiding in Africa or Thailand, now believed he was in Malaysia.

The paper quoted “people representing Zakir in his absence in Mumbai” as confirming his Malaysian citizenship.

According to the daily’s source, Naik had obtained citizenship as a package deal along with the Tokoh Ma’al Hijrah award which was conferred upon him by the government in 2013.

“It is the state policy of Malaysia to offer citizenship to the awardees of the highest civilian honour of their land. Zakir is now a Malaysian citizen too,” the Hindustan Times quoted a representative of Naik as saying.

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