

NO 'VISA ON ARRIVAL' FOR HOTSPOT NATIONS

KUALA LUMPUR: Visa on Arrival (VOA) issuance has ceased to countries deemed hotspots for human trafficking, the Dewan Rakyat was told yesterday.

They include India, China and Iran.

Home Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the move was to ensure that the facility given by the government was not misused by human trafficking syndicates.

“We are not prejudiced to any countries, but we have to look at the source of the problem and these are the countries that are deemed to be hotspots.

“The problem is not with the countries, but it is with the syndicates who operate within those countries,” he said in reply to a supplementary question from Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin (BN-Kinabatangan).

Zahid said there were cases of syndicates taking advantage of the student visa scheme.

The suspects were registered in colleges and language centres but joined syndicates thereafter.

“I am not pointing fingers to any ministry in particular, but the issuance of student visa is another source of the problem,” he explained.

Zahid said he was in the midst of discussion with the Attorney-General’s Chambers to establish a special court to hear cases relating to human trafficking.

He said only 153 out of 777 people arrested for human trafficking had been charged in court so far.



“We need to set up a special court to expedite the hearing of such cases,” he said.

To the original question from Julian Tan Kok Ping (DAP-Stampin) on steps taken by the ministry to improve Malaysia's ranking, currently on Tier 3 of the United States State Department's Trafficking in Person list, Zahid said a high-level committee involving five ministries had been formed to tackle human trafficking issues.

"I have discussed with a few agencies in the US and they have confirmed that the drop was automatic for countries that have been in the same tier for three consecutive years."

Zahid said the government had allocated special funds to the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Council to conduct their activities as part of their move to tackle the issue.

He said the ministry had increased the numbers of security personnel in hotspots, especially in the country's borders, and was working with relevant agencies.

"The government is also working with non-governmental organisations to help the victims and had allocated funds for them to conduct their programmes."