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Drugs: 729 M'sians held abroad

A TOTAL of 729 Malaysians, of whom more than half are women, were arrested abroad from 1991 to March this year for drug-related offences, the Dewan Rakyat was told Monday.

Deputy Foreign Minister Senator A. Kohilan Pillay said they were part of 1,560 Malaysians arrested abroad during the period for various offences including involvement in crime.

Speaking when winding up the debate for the Supplementary Supply Bill (2009) 2010 for the ministry, he said a fund had been set up to provide legal aid for those facing court charges and to bring back those who were freed from detention.

On drug mules, he called on related agencies such as customs, immigration and police to tighten checks at all entry points, including at airports to combat the activity.

He said the foreign ministry also carried out dialogues with the public to remind them not to fall into the trap of international drug syndicates.

Meanwhile, all Members of Parliament (MPs) must play a vital role in helping create awareness among the people with regard to the dangers involved in HIV/AIDS.

Dewan Negara President Datuk Wong Foon Meng said MPs have a role to play in educating the people of the dangers and preventive measures to avoid or reduce the number of HIV/Aids cases.

"Their role is important and they must focus on

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the issues and dangers involved in immoral social activities, which endanger women especially," he told reporters after opening a HIV/Aids Awareness campaign at the Parliament building here Monday.

He also urged corporate, private companies, government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGO) to come forward and support such campaigns, so as to curb the spread of such diseases to the younger generation.

"The role of the younger generation is very important because their efforts and energy is needed to contribute towards the economy and development of the country," he said.

Wong, 56, who replaced Tan Sri Dr Abdul Hamid Pawanteh as the president on July 7, last year, also announced that today would be his last day of office as the Dewan Negara President and that his successor would be announced on April 26.

The former Kuala Terengganu state assemblyman from 1995-1999 became the sixth non-Malay President of Dewan Negara after Tun Omar Yoke Lin Ong, Tan Sri Benedict Stephens, Tan Sri Chan Choong Tak, Tan Sri G. Vadiveloo and Tan Sri Michael Chen Wing Sum.

Meanwhile, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz said the government had already identified name of Wong's successor.

"We have the candidate but the name will be announced later," he said.— Bernama