

M'sia to negotiate with N. Korea

Wisma Putra will deal directly in securing release of citizens

By NEVILLE SPYKERMAN
neville@thestar.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia will deal directly with North Korea to secure the return of its embassy staff and their families, said Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman.

Although there were offers from many countries to mediate, Anifah said, channels of communication between Malaysia and North Korea remained open and both countries would hold direct negotiations.

"We still have diplomatic ties with North Korea and we are constantly in touch with them through their embassy here in Kuala Lumpur," he told a press conference at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations here yesterday.

Wisma Putra was preparing the formal negotiations which, he said, would be held very soon.

Anifah said they were ready for the negotiations but needed to get some facts from other agencies including the police and the Ministry of Health.

"We need their input so whatever decisions and whatever is discussed, we understand fully what we can do, what we can't do and what needs to be done," he said.

He said both Malaysia and North Korea would discuss an appropriate location to hold direct negotiations.



Calming fears: Anifah (centre) assuring family members of Malaysians trapped in Pyongyang that everything is being done to bring them home.

Anifah said travel restrictions against North Koreans in Malaysia would continue as long as Malaysians there faced the same restrictions.

Earlier Anifah met family members of the nine Malaysians barred from leaving North Korea and assured them that everything was being done to bring them home.

He said North Korea had also assured the Malaysian Government that all Malaysians there were safe. "Wisma Putra is in constant con-

countries' Ambassadors there, he said, had also offered to bring in supplies from Beijing for the Malaysians.

Besides Mohd Nor Azrin, the other Malaysians in North Korea are his wife Iza Karnilia Ranli, 33, and their children Annur Zulailha, Aynur Zhaifrah and Ayscha Zinnirah.

Also there are the Malaysian ambassador's personal assistant Noor Saaidah Jamaludin, administrative assistant Nirmala Malar Kodi Singaram along with two others.

The diplomatic row between both countries escalated after the assassination of Kim Jong-nam, the half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un at KLIA2 on Feb 13.

Last Tuesday, North Korea barred all Malaysians from leaving the restrictive country and hours later, Malaysia announced a similar restriction, preventing all North Koreans from leaving the country.

Two other Malaysians who worked with the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) - Nyanaaprakash Munhandy and Stella Lim - were allowed to leave for Beijing.

If unclaimed, Jong-nam's remains may be buried here

GEORGE TOWN: The body of Kim Jong-nam, the half-brother of North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un, may be buried in Malaysia if it is unclaimed. This is normal procedure for any unclaimed body, Deputy Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Hilmi Yahaya said.

"Usually, we would release the body to the next of kin. However, if it is unclaimed, we will bury the body."

"There is no time frame as to when to release the body."

"In the case of Jong-nam, we are not in a hurry to dispose of the body."

"Since this is a high profile case, wait for our decision," he said in a text message yesterday.

Earlier, Dr Hilmi told reporters after flagging off the MTB Jamboree Balik Pulau that the Health Ministry needed some time to decide on what to do with the remains of Jong-nam.

The body was handed over to the ministry on Friday by the police.

Meanwhile, the diplomatic tension between Malaysia and North Korea will not result in a war between both nations, said Datuk Seri Hisshammuddin Hussein.

But the Defence Minister said the bilateral ties of both nations had been affected.

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