

Anwar case remains on US radar screens
Malaysiakini.com
April 15, 2010

The United States will continue to scrutinise the controversial sodomy trial of Malaysia's opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim despite improving bilateral relations, a US official said Wednesday.

"Let's be clear that the two sides try not to avoid the issues on which there will be continuing discussions, perhaps some difficulties and challenges, and any good relationship is able to deal with those issues," Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs Kurt Campbell said.

"We must say, it is well known to all of you, Anwar has many friends in the United States - very high level friends, people who care about him and we want very much for his treatment to be just and we are watching carefully in this regard," Campbell said.

Anwar is facing trial over allegations he had illicit sexual relations with a young man who worked in his office.

NONEThe 62-year-old opposition leader has said the sodomy trial, which could see him jailed for up to 20 years if convicted, is a plot to end his political career.

Anwar was sacked in 1998 and convicted on sodomy and corruption charges but was released in 2004 after the sexual misconduct count was overturned, allowing him to make a comeback to politics as the leader of a reinvigorated opposition.

Human Rights Watch, a US group, has urged Malaysia to drop the sodomy charges, condemning the case as a "charade of justice."

The trial opened briefly earlier this year and is scheduled to resume on May 10.

Campbell, who spoke at a forum on US-Malaysia relations, did not say whether Anwar's case was raised at a meeting Monday between US President Barack Obama and visiting Malaysian premier Najib Razak on the sidelines of a landmark nuclear security summit.

Najib had earlier Wednesday addressed the forum on US-Malaysia ties organised by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

"So the fact that we were able, I think, both to talk about the issues that we were closely aligned but also issues of some challenge without getting our feelings immediately hurt and saying 'that's it' I think is a tribute" to the matured relationship, Campbell said.

Some anxieties

He also said that the United States had "some anxieties about the role of Islamic law - how it is applied with Malaysian common law and how these two secular and religious trends in the country can be reconciled.

"And we watch that carefully."

An Islamic court in Malaysia on Wednesday rejected Anwar's bid to prosecute the man accusing him of sodomy for making a false claim.

Anwar, whose sodomy trial is being heard in a civil court, had filed a religious complaint - called a "qazaf" - against Mohamad Saiful Bukhari Azlan, 24, accusing him of lying and saying he could not produce the four witnesses required under Islamic law to verify a sodomy charge.

He asked the religious court to compel prosecutors to charge Saiful with the offense, but the application was dismissed.

Malaysia has a dual-track legal system, with civil courts operating alongside Islamic courts which can try Muslims, who make up the majority of the population, for religious and moral offences.

Campbell said that Malaysia also wanted the United States to play a more "consequential" role in trying to bring peace in the Middle East.

"The fact that Malaysia has, in their perspective, a very purposeful commitment to these issues is something that the United States must take seriously," he said.

- AFP

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/129236>