

Gov't condemns latest maid abuse case
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Malaysia on Wednesday condemned the abuse of Indonesian maids after a 26-year-old woman was raped and scalded, in an attempt to quell rising anger over the issue.

In June last year Indonesia barred domestic workers going to Malaysia after a series of incidents of shocking mistreatment.

In the latest case last week Malaysian police arrested a couple for attacking their Indonesian maid with a hot iron and scalding water.

The husband is also accused of repeatedly raping the woman.

The maid, from East Java, was rescued by a passerby after her employers, a 41-year-old building contractor and his wife, abandoned her at the roadside.

"The government of Malaysia strongly condemns all forms of abuse against any worker, regardless of nationality or sector of employment," Foreign Minister Anifah Aman said in a statement.

"It is regretful this incident took place, despite repeated advice to Malaysian employers of domestic workers," he said, in a rare move that signals the issue's potential to further damage ties between the neighbours.

Malaysia - one of Asia's largest importers of labour - depends heavily on domestic workers, who come mainly from neighbouring Indonesia, but has no laws governing their working conditions.

Anifah promised a swift probe into the affair and said the perpetrators would be handed "the necessary sentence", after authorities were accused of proceeding too slowly in past cases involving allegedly abusive employers.

Indonesia's official block on domestic workers going to Malaysia has little effect in practice, but Indonesian Labour Minister Muhaimin Iskandar cautioned Indonesian women not to work there until their safety can be assured.

"The minister just wanted to reiterate that please don't go to Malaysia to work as a maid until the moratorium is lifted," Widyarka Ryananta, a spokesman for the Indonesian embassy in Kuala Lumpur, told AFP.

"Don't use social or tourist visas to come here and work as a maid," he added.

Malaysia and Indonesia have been working to establish official working conditions for maids, but negotiations are making a slow progress due to disagreement over proposed minimum wage.

There are about 1.2 million documented Indonesian workers in Malaysia, as well as about 800,000 Indonesians working illegally.

- AFP

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