

Newspaper	MALAYSIAN RESERVE
Date	09 MARCH 2017

Najib: Malaysia-North Korea diplomatic ties still on

Malaysian Reserve - 9/3/2017

The welfare of our Malaysian citizens is of the utmost importance, thus it's best to initiate the plan in secrecy, says Najib

by P PREM KUMAR

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Razak said Malaysia will not cease diplomatic ties with North Korea currently, as it provides the country with a channel to negotiate the release of Malaysians from Pyongyang.

Najib said the government will hold negotiations with the North Korean government, to find the root cause of the diplomatic dispute following the murder of Kim Jong-nam on Feb 13 by two female suspects at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2.

"At the moment, (Malaysia-North Korea) diplomatic ties are still on, providing us with a channel to talk and negotiate with them (North Korea)," he told reporters at the Parliament lobby yesterday.

Malaysia will use various strategies to negotiate with Pyongyang, said Najib, but declined to divulge specific details due to the safety of Malaysians in North Korea.

"We have formulated a plan which I cannot reveal. The welfare of our Malaysian citizens is of the utmost importance, thus it's best to initiate the plan in secrecy," he added.

Najib also declined to comment on whether Malaysia would approach China for help to resolve the diplomatic crisis with North Korea and ensure the release of 11 Malaysians trapped in Pyongyang.

On North Korea's action to disallow Malaysians to return home, Najib said the government was surprised with the country's actions from the beginning as Malaysia was one of the few countries that maintained friendly ties with Pyongyang.

"We didn't pick a quarrel with them and it was never our intention, but when a crime has been committed in the country — especially using chemical weapons — we are duty-bound to protect the



Pic by Muhd Amin Naharui

They are not quarantined in one place, and they are able to carry out their daily lives with no worry for their safety, says Najib

interest and safety of Malaysians," he explained.

Najib said the National Security Council on Tuesday was briefed on the welfare of

Malaysians in Pyongyang and the high-powered meeting was informed that the Malaysians were allowed to carry out their daily activities normally

despite the travel ban.

"They are not quarantined in one place, and they are able to carry out their daily lives with no worry for their safety," said Najib.

It was reported by North Korean state media on Tuesday that the country has banned all Malaysian citizens from leaving the country and are potentially being held as hostages.

This came after North Korea's Ambassador to Malaysia Kang Chol, who was declared persona non grata, left Malaysia on Monday evening following a diplomatic dispute between both countries over the killing of Jong-nam.

Kang was expelled and given 48 hours to leave the country, which expired on Monday, for failing to apologise for his accusations that Malaysia was hiding matters in the investigation on Jong-nam's killing.

Kang also remained steadfast on his country's unverified conclusion that Jong-nam died of a heart attack, and not due to the VX nerve agent, as declared by the police and health authorities.