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Najib returns to chair urgent NSC meeting

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Jakarta trip cut short to resolve ban on M'sians leaving Pyongyang

PETALING JAYA: As the fate of 11 Malaysians trapped in Pyongyang hangs in the balance following North Korea's move to bar them from leaving the reclusive country, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak cut short his trip to Jakarta, and flew home to chair an emergency meeting of the National Security Council.

This is the first time Najib has chaired an NSC emergency meeting since he became Prime Minister in 2009.

The NSC is the highest decision-making body on matters relating to national security threats. Since its formation in 1971, the NSC has issued 21 directives to tackle various threats including terrorism and natural disasters.

"I assure the families that we will do everything that we can to ensure their safe return," Najib said in his blog, najibrazak.com.

The Prime Minister said he was given a detailed briefing on the latest situation by the relevant agencies during their 45-minute meeting.

Najib also issued a strongly worded statement condemning North Korea's decision.

"This abhorrent act, effectively



holding our citizens hostage, is in total disregard of all international laws and diplomatic norms.

"Our hope is for a swift resolution. I call upon the North Korean leadership to immediately allow our citizens to leave to avoid any further escalation."

The Prime Minister who cut short his working visit to Jakarta for the 20th Indian Ocean Rim Association summit, convened the meeting immediately upon his arrival at the Air Force base in Subang.

Also at the meeting were his deputy Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Armed Forces Chief Jen Tan Sri Raja Mohamed Affandi Raja Mohamed Noor, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar and Wisma Putra's secretary-general Datuk Ramlan Ibrahim.

Before leaving Jakarta, Najib told Malaysian reporters that North



Emergency situation: Najib chairing the NSC meeting in Petaling Jaya. Also present are (from left) Malaysian Armed Forces chief General Tan Sri Zulkifeli Mohd Zin, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Dr Ali Hamsa, Dr Ahmad Zahid and Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Seri Dr Salleh Said Keruak. — Bernama

Korea's move to ban Malaysian citizens from leaving was a despicable act which cannot be tolerated.

A grim-looking Najib described the relationship between the two countries as "tense".

"Protecting Malaysians is my priority, and we will not hesitate to take all necessary measures when they are threatened," he said.

North Korea has decided to "temporarily ban the exit of Malaysian citizens in the DPRK" reported the official news agency KCNA.

KCNA said the prohibition would remain in place "until the safety of the diplomats and citizens of the DPRK in Malaysia is fully guaranteed through the fair settlement of the case that occurred in Malaysia".

A few hours after Pyongyang's announcement, Najib announced that all North Koreans in Malaysia would not be allowed to leave.

North Korea opened its embassy in Kuala Lumpur in 2003. It is reported that there are an estimated 1,000 North Koreans in the country.

Diplomatic stand-off

- 10.55am:** North Korea issues travel ban on all Malaysians.
- 11.15am:** Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi holds emergency press conference announcing ban on North Korean diplomats leaving Malaysia.
- 11.30am:** Police blocks road leading to North Korean embassy and seals the premises.
- 12.30pm:** Deputy Home Minister Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed shows up at the embassy and tells reporters that embassy was cordoned off to identify everyone inside.
- 12.45pm:** In Pyongyang, Malaysian embassy counsellor Mohd Nor Azrin Md Zain says the situation is fine there.
- 12.50pm:** Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak bans all North Koreans from leaving Malaysia and calls for an emergency National Security Council (NSC) meeting.
- 1.35pm:** Police unseal embassy premises and leave after embassy counsellor Kim Yu-song spoke to them for a few minutes.
- 5.30pm:** Najib returns from Jakarta to chair NSC meeting.