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Malaysians in N. Korea **safe**

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> PM says 11 not in detention, but declined comment on talks to lift restriction by Pyongyang

BY **AIEZAT FADZELL**
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak said the 11 Malaysians currently in North Korea are safe.

"We have been informed they are allowed to carry on with their daily routine. They have not been held indoors and are allowed to go out and about as usual, there is no worry over their safety," Najib said at the Parliament lobby.

On whether Malaysia has commenced negotiations with Pyongyang to release the 11, Najib said he was not at liberty to reveal Putrajaya's strategy.

"I know you're hungry for news but you must appreciate that this is a sensitive matter and sometimes, it is best conducted in secrecy so that we can achieve the desired results," he said yesterday.

On Tuesday, Pyongyang barred all Malaysians from leaving North Korea, effectively holding them hostage amid an increasingly heated diplomatic row over the murder of Kim Jong-Nam in Kuala Lumpur on Feb 13.



Putrajaya responded by cordoning off the North Korean embassy and barring its citizens from leaving Malaysia.

Najib said the move was to facilitate negotiations with Pyongyang on the matter, adding

that Malaysia only wanted to protect its sovereignty and has no intention of straining its diplomatic ties with North Korea.

"We are one of the very few countries that are quite friendly with North Korea.

"We didn't pick a quarrel with them, it was never our intention. But when a crime is committed, especially when a chemical weapon is used in Malaysia, we are bound to protect the interest of our people," he said.