

Aussie minister may have to testify over refugee swap

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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 15 — Australian Immigration Minister Chris Bowen may be called before the Melbourne High Court to justify his decision to send asylum seekers to Malaysia under a controversial refugee swap deal, according to The Australian.

This comes after refugee lawyers cited “inconsistencies” between the affidavit Bowen submitted over the weekend to explain his reasons for expelling asylum seekers from Australia and a previously filed briefing note on the case.

Refugee advocate David Manne told reporters outside the High Court that the embattled minister might be called to the stand to clarify how he decided Malaysia was a place that could legally be declared as having adequate human rights protection.

“That is a matter of course of considerable controversy in this case, it is one of the key questions in this case and we’re having a good look at that evidence now to resolve how that may be tested or how it may be treated in the court,” Manne was quoted by The Australian as saying.

“One of the possibilities is yes, that he could indeed be called to give evidence but that has not been resolved.”

According to the daily, Solicitor-General Stephen Gageler said the court was prepared to accommodate any “real questions” about the affidavit before the scheduled full hearing next week.

Australia’s highest court had on August 8 extended an injunction halting the deportation of asylum seekers to Malaysia after lawyers there challenged the Australian government’s legal right to send refugees to Malaysia.

The injunction will last until a final ruling is made, with the Australian court expected to begin hearing arguments on August 22.

Under the refugee swap deal dubbed “The Malaysian Solution”, Australia will send 800 asylum seekers to Malaysia for offshore processing in return for 4,800 refugees from Malaysia.

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