

Sirul a potential diplomatic thorn in Malaysia-Australia ties, says report
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Murder convict Sirul Azhar Umar, who is being held in Villawood Immigration Detention Centre in Sydney, and his application for asylum remain a touchy issue for the Australian government, The Australian reported.

The daily said the Australian Border Force (ABF), tasked with providing the highest security for Sirul (pic) in Villawood, faced tough questions over how a convicted murderer sentenced to death in Malaysia could make politically charged statements while in detention in Australia.

News portal Malaysiakini had published a series of videos by Sirul, in one of which he indicated his intention to reveal the names of those who purportedly attempted to bribe or coax him into implicating Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak in the 2006 murder of Mongolian Altantuya Shaaribuu.

ABF has denied that the videos were filmed in Villawood, but lawyer Americk Singh Sidhu said the videos were made during his detention in Australia.

"It's only logical the video was done sometime in early January because in it he refers to his lawyers' press conference where they mentioned his protection visa," Americk was quoted as saying by The Australian.

Sirul and former policeman Azilah Hadri were convicted of killing Altantuya and blowing up her body with military explosives in a jungle near Shah Alam 10 years ago.

Azilah is being held on death row in prison.

Diplomatic relations between Australia and Malaysia have improved following close co-operation after the Malaysia Airlines MH370 and MH17 tragedies, and the need to find moderate Islamic defence in the region against a growing threat of transnational terrorism.

But Australia recently came under the spotlight over its policy on asylum seekers.

In November last year, a boat carrying asylum seekers was towed away by the Australian Navy from its Indian Ocean territory of Christmas Island, AFP reported.

Christmas Island, which lies between the Australian mainland and Indonesia, houses an immigration detention facility.

But the government no longer takes asylum seekers arriving by boat to the territory, sending them instead to the Pacific islands of Nauru and Manus.

A week ago, an Australian hospital refused to return an asylum seeker's baby to

detention in Nauru, as momentum built across the country against offshore Pacific camps for processing refugees.

The hospital's move came as state governments, churches and activists stepped up their efforts to stop the return of some 267 refugees to Nauru following a High Court ruling. – February 21, 2016.

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