

## **KL, Pyongyang Will Sit For Talks In The Next Few Days - Anifah Aman**

KUALA LUMPUR, March 11 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will hold an official meeting with North Korea in the next few days in a bid to bring home Malaysians barred from leaving the country.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman said that currently his ministry was having internal discussions with relevant parties including the police and Health Ministry in preparation for the talks.

On Tuesday, North Korea barred all Malaysians from leaving the reclusive country. Eleven of them were initially affected but two, who are United Nations employees, were allowed to leave and are currently in Beijing.

"We want to study in detail what we will be discussing before the official meeting...must look from the legal, humanitarian and security aspects.

"We will take all this into consideration," Anifah told reporters after having a closed-door meeting here today with family members of the affected Malaysians.

Anifah said the venue of the meeting with the North Korean side had yet to be determined.

Anifah said Malaysia did not need a third party's involvement in resolving the stand-off with North Korea despite receiving many offers.

He said foreign ministers of several countries had called him directly while others had their officers contacting Foreign Ministry secretary-general Datuk Ramlan Ibrahim to offer their assistance.

"We still have diplomatic ties (with North Korea), we don't need a third party although there are many offers," the foreign minister said.

He noted that currently the Malaysian government was still able to speak directly with the North Korean government through their embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

Anifah said diplomatic relations between Malaysia and North Korea would be maintained if the nine Malaysian nationals who were prevented from leaving that country could return to Malaysia quickly and safely.

Kuala Lumpur-Pyongyang ties soured in the aftermath of the Feb 13 assassination of Kim Jong-nam, the estranged half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un at KL International Airport 2 (klia2).

He died on the way to hospital after getting his face swiped with a chemical substance, later identified as the VX nerve agent, while waiting for a flight to Macau. Two foreign women have been charged with the murder.

On how long Malaysia would keep Jong-nam's body, Anifah said the matter would be raised in the planned meeting, as Malaysia would not want to keep the remains longer than necessary.

"Eventually have to hand over (Kim Jong-Nam's remains) to someone whether from the government or family members, this we will handle when we come to that stage," he said.

When asked about halal food supplies for Malaysians stuck in North Korea, Anifah said the embassy in Pyongyang would normally get the supplies and other items from Beijing.

Our staff have also received support from other foreign missions in Pyongyang," Anifah said, citing those expressed by ambassadors from Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries on the sidelines of Friday prayers yesterday.

The assistance offered, he said, included the possibility of bringing supplies from outside North Korea.

"For your information, staff of embassies in North Korea regularly fly to Beijing for this purpose," he said.

The nine remaining Malaysians comprise three staff of the mission in Pyongyang and their family members.

Two other Malaysians - Stella Lim and Nyanaprakash Muniandy - who participated in the World Food Programme (WFP) under the United Nations were allowed to leave Pyongyang and are currently in Beijing.

The ban preventing all Malaysian citizens from leaving came about after Malaysia declared North Korean ambassador Kang Chol as persona non grata, leading to his expulsion from the country on March 6.

It was reported that Kang Chol had made unfounded and baseless accusations against the Malaysian government in relation to the probe into Jong-nam's murder.

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