

N. Korean Envoy Declared Persona Non Grata, Given 48 Hours To Leave Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, March 4 (Bernama) -- The Malaysian government has declared North Korean envoy Kang Chol 'Persona Non Grata' who has been given 48 hours to leave the country, said Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman.

In a statement Saturday night, he said the ambassador had been summoned to the Foreign Ministry for a meeting with a ministry official at 6pm today but failed to be present.

The ministry, via a diplomatic note sent to the embassy this evening, informed the North Korean government that Kang Chol had been declared persona non grata by the Malaysian government.

"He is expected to leave Malaysia within 48 hours from the scheduled time of the meeting, namely 6pm, March 4, 2017," he said.

Anifah said it should be made clear that Malaysia would react strongly against any insults made against it or any attempt to tarnish its reputation.

"It should be recalled that the ambassador had alleged the conduct of the investigation into the death of a North Korean citizen on Feb 13, 2017 indicates that the Malaysian government had something to hide and that Malaysia has colluded with outside powers to defame his country," Anifah said.

He was alluding to the murder of Kim Chol, widely reported to be Kim Jong-nam, the estranged half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, at Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2 (klia2) in a case that has garnered international attention.

Anifah drove home the point that recent events, including the release of North Korean national Ri Jong-chol, from police custody for the lack of evidence to charge him was proof

that the probe was conducted in an impartial, fair and transparent manner, as befits a country that practices the rule of law.

The expulsion of the envoy comes on the heels of the decision of the Malaysian government, announced by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi that effective March 6, North Korean citizens require visas to enter Malaysia.

"This is an indication of the government's concern that Malaysia may have been used for illegal activities. These measures are part of the process by the Malaysian government to review its relations with North Korea," Anifah said.

Anifah revealed that at 5pm on Tuesday (Feb 28), ministry officials led by Deputy Secretary-General for Bilateral Affairs Raja Nushirwan Zainal Abidin met with a North Korean delegation led by Kim Song.

During the meeting, he said, the Malaysian government demanded a written apology from North Korea over recent accusations against Malaysia made by the ambassador.

The delegation was informed that if no response was received by 10pm that day, the Malaysian government would take measures that would best protect its interests.

"Almost four days have passed since the deadline lapsed. No such apology has been made, neither has there been any indication that one is forthcoming. For this reason, the ambassador has been declared Persona Non Grata," Anifah said.

Raja Nushirwan was the ministry official Kang Chol was supposed to meet at the Foreign Ministry at 6pm today, pursuant to instructions from Anifah.

The statement said Persona Non Grata literally meant 'Person Not Appreciated', and a person declared as such by the receiving state was barred from entering or remaining in the country.

Anifah said: "It's the most serious form of disapproval that the country can apply to foreign diplomats. It's also often used to express displeasure at the conduct or policies of the sending state."

Citing Article 9 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961), the foreign minister said the receiving country may at any time and without having to explain its decision, declare ambassadors or heads of missions or any member of the diplomatic staff as Persona Non Grata.

In such cases, the sending state shall recall the person or terminate his function with the embassy or mission.

"If the sending state refuses to do so, the receiving state may refuse to recognise the person concerned as a member of the embassy or mission," he said.

Jong-nam was at the klia2 on Feb 13 to board a flight to Macau when two women suddenly appeared before him and allegedly wiped his face with the palms of their hands which contained what was later identified as the VX nerve agent.

He was rushed to the Putrajaya Hospital but died on the way.

Jong-nam was reportedly using a passport bearing the name Kim Chol while in Malaysia.

Two women, 25-year-old Siti Aisyah, 25, an Indonesian, and 28-year-old Doan Thi Huong, a Vietnamese, were charged in the Sepang Sessions Court on Wednesday with the murder of Kim Chol.

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