

China Best Choice To Resolve Malaysia-North Korea Diplomatic Row - Experts

By Ismail Amsyar Mohd Said and Ammar Shafiq Hamzah

KUALA LUMPUR, March 7 (Bernama) -- The crisis between Malaysia and North Korea since the murder of Kim Chol - widely believed to be Kim Jong-nam, the estranged half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un - likely needs a mediator to be resolved, according to geopolitics and International Law experts.

China is seen to be the best choice for the role, as it has close ties with both countries.

Geopolitical expert Professor Dr Azmi Hassan said relations between the two countries have become strained as Pyongyang continues to take actions that worsen the situation as Malaysia searches for the truth in solving the murder of Kim Chol.

"Malaysia can refer to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), but it will take a long time, and North Korea would most certainly ignore any pressure by the international body.

"So the best option is to use China's close ties with North Korea to let the republic know that if their attitude towards Malaysia continues, it may provide an opportunity to rivals such as the United States, Japan and South Korea to intervene," he told Bernama.

According to him, Beijing has a very strong influence over Pyongyang, and Beijing also trusts Kuala Lumpur, so this makes the superpower the ideal party to resolve the crisis.

Diplomatic relations between Malaysia and North Korea were established on June 30, 1973, and had remained good for over four decades before the incident occurred last month.

However, former International Trade and Industry minister Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz said yesterday that the strained relationship would not affect Malaysia's economy as North Korea was not one of the country's main trade or investment partner.

Malaysia had set up its embassy in Pyongyang on Feb 28, 2004, and was the first country whose citizens were allowed to visit that country without a visa.

In addition, the two countries had also enhanced cooperation in the exchange of information such as news, documentaries and television programmes, including a news exchange programme between the Malaysian National News Agency (Bernama) and the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

In 2007, North Korean Prime Minister Kim Yong-il had also visited Malaysia to strengthen bilateral ties and friendship between the two countries.

But since Feb 13 - the day Kim Chol was murdered at klia 2 in Sepang - relations between the two countries went south, and today, dipped further, as North Korea banned Malaysians there from leaving the country, effectively taking them hostage.

How far will North Korea go in this situation? Azmi does not expect them to take military action against Malaysia.

"North Korea will not go so far as to take military action. They know who their real enemy is, and it's not Malaysia.

"After all, Malaysia does not want to be hostile towards them, Malaysia just wants to solve and find the truth behind the murder of Kim Chol," he said.

International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) International Law expert Dr Mohd Yazid Zul Kepli said Malaysia's reciprocal move barring North Koreans to leave the country did not violate international laws.

According to him, it is based on a concept under international law known as a reprisal, where a country can take actions which contradict the law if another country does it against them first.

"For example, if a neighbouring country seizes Malaysia's asset or property in their country, Malaysia can also seize the neighbouring country's asset in Malaysia of the same value," he said.

Malaysia is also scheduled to face North Korea in the qualifying round of the Asian Cup football on March 28 in Pyongyang, and has requested the match be held at a neutral venue due to security concerns.

Could Beijing be the best ground?

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