

Malaysia rules out snapping diplomatic ties with North Korea

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Malaysia has made it clear that it has no plans to cut off diplomatic ties with North Korea despite the continuing standoff between the countries.

Najib Razak

Malaysia's stand was spelt out by its Prime Minister Najib Razak who told the country's Parliament that his government still needs a channel to talk and negotiate with North Korea.

Najib further said that the safety of Malaysians in North Korea was the top priority of his government.

"We received information that they are allowed to live their lives as usual. They are not confined, can get out, and do normal business. So there is no concern over their safety," the Prime Minister said.

Razak said the travel ban on North Korean citizens in Malaysia would stay while the government was "carefully studying what is Pyongyang's (demands) actually".

He made the remarks after chairing a National Security Council on Tuesday evening during which the Prime Minister was briefed about the situation.

In a strong worded statement, Razak accused North Korea of taking Malaysian citizens hostages and called for their immediate release.

Malaysia and North Korea used to enjoy relatively cordial relations until the death of Kim Jong-nam, the half-brother of North Korean Leader Kim Jong-un, at the Kuala Lumpur airport.

The ensuing investigation implicated several North Korean nationals, including a second secretary of North Korea's embassy in Malaysia and an employee from the communist nation's national carrier Air Koryo.

Malaysian police said Kim was poisoned by a lethal chemical called VX nerve agent.

While North Korea demanded the return of the body, the Malaysian police insisted the next-of-kin come for DNA profiling.

Razak said police needed to find the cause of the death of Kim.

"When a murder is committed, especially when a chemical weapon is used, we have to protect the interests of the nation," he said.

Ties between Malaysia and North Korea strained after both sides issued a travel ban on each other's citizens.

- (With IANS inputs)