

## US warns against 'politically motivated' prosecution of Ibrahim

The United States Tuesday warned Malaysia against a 'politically-motivated' investigation or prosecution of opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, accused of sodomising his aide.

In doing so, the US is taking a stand identical to what it had a decade back when Ibrahim was prosecuted on the same charge.

'The main point for us is that the rule of law needs to stand above politics. And we would certainly oppose any use of law enforcement or judicial procedures for anything other than legitimate purposes of the law,' The Star Online quoted US State Department spokesperson Tom Casey as saying in a report from Washington.

Adding that Ibrahim had faced similar charges in the past (in 1998, when he was deputy prime minister in the government of prime minister Mahathir Mohamad) and his conviction was overturned, Casey added: 'So, we would hope that there's not a pattern here.'

'But, certainly, we would be concerned that anything that is done be done in a way that is appropriate, that is a legitimate investigation of charges that might exist under Malaysian law, and would not be anything that was a politically motivated investigation or prosecution.'

The US comment came hours after Ibrahim left the Turkish Embassy, where he had taken refuge on Sunday after receiving threatening messages.

He left, accompanied by his wife and daughter, after Deputy Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak and Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar gave assurances on Ibrahim's personal safety but advised that the law be allowed to take its course, The Star Online said.

'We assure him of his personal safety. He's never been harassed all this while especially when he was campaigning as an opposition leader,' Razak told reporters Monday. 'There's no talk of arrest, we will probably take him to his house.'

Ibrahim has denied the sodomy charge saying it is meant to prevent his return to parliament in a by-election.

He has emerged politically strong since March election, heading an opposition alliance that won an unprecedented 82 seats and controls five of the 13 states. Ibrahim claims that he can bring down the government of Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi by September.

While the political ripples were being felt, a diplomatic stand-off was averted when the Malaysian government accepted Turkish Ambassador Barlaz Ozener's version that Ibrahim had not been invited but had come on his own Sunday to request that he be allowed to stay on.

Summoned to the Wisma Putra, the foreign office headquarters, Ozener also 'categorically denied' that Ibrahim had asked for political asylum.

'The ministry accepts his explanation at face value that Anwar came to stay without an invitation,' Malaysian Foreign Minister Rais Yatim was quoted as saying in the New Straits Times.

Ibrahim's wife Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, who is also opposition leader in parliament, had distributed to the media photographs of Mohammed Saiful Bukhari Azlan, the aide who has made the accusation, along with three ministers or their staff.

All three -- Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Shahrir Samad, Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Mustapa Mohamed and Tourism Minister Azalina Othman -- denied any involvement.

The posh condominium in Desa Damansara locality here where Ibrahim was alleged to have committed the crime was the scene of much activity thronged by investigators and media.

The officials were seen taking away closed circuit TV and other equipment, the New Straits Times said Tuesday.

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