Beat: News

Malaysia to extradite diplomat wanted in New Zealand for sex crime

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USPA News - A Malaysian diplomat, who was allowed to leave New Zealand last month after being accused of sexually assaulting a young woman in Wellington, will return to face the charges against him, the Malaysian government said on Wednesday. In a statement issued by Malaysia`s foreign ministry, the government said it had decided to send back diplomat Muhammad Rizalman bin Ismail to aid New Zealand`s investigation into accusations made last month in regards to burglary and assault with intent to commit rape.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Anifah Aman notified New Zealand Foreign Minister Murray McCully of the government`s decision. Muhammad Rizalman will be escorted back to New Zealand by a senior military officer from the defense ministry, the foreign ministry said. Muhammad Rizalman, the former defense staff assistant at Malaysia`s High Commission in Wellington, was arrested on May 10 after the alleged attack on the victim`s residence in the Wellington suburb of Brooklyn. After Malaysia granted him immunity, apparently believing that it did so with the approval of the New Zealand government, he left New Zealand without facing trial. The Malaysian government said Wednesday`s decision will provide an opportunity for Muhammad Rizalman to cooperate fully and aid authorities in the ongoing investigation into the claims made against him. It also pledged to provide legal assistance to Muhammad Rizalman and emphasized that the legal principle of an individual being considered innocent until proven guilty also applies to its diplomat. McCully, in a separate statement, welcomed the announcement that Muhammad Rizalman will return to New Zealand and said there was never any intention by either government to let the matter rest. "Regardless of whether the process took place in Malaysia or New Zealand there was a strong commitment to seeing justice done," he said. Malaysia`s foreign ministry added that it has "complete faith" in New Zealand`s legal system and has "full confidence" that Muhammad Rizalman will be given a fair trial and treated with dignity as provided under the law. "The Government of Malaysia`s decision is a clear testament of the excellent bilateral relations between Malaysia and New Zealand," the statement added. McCully praised Malaysian authorities for approaching the issue with good faith and integrity, even though the accusations initially caused political and public controversy in New Zealand. "The young woman involved has been through a great deal and the way this matter has been handled has only added to her suffering," he said. "I hope she, and her family, will welcome news that the accused will return to New Zealand so the matter can be fully investigated as was always the Government`s intention," McCully added.

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