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Anwar's daughter urges Obama to pressure Malaysian leader

By David Brunnstrom

The daughter of detained Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim called on the Obama administration on Friday to put pressure on her country's prime minister, Najib Razak, to release her father and abandon authoritarian policies.

In an interview in Washington during a visit to lobby U.S. officials and politicians, Nurul Izzah Anwar said it was important that Najib was not able to use a visit to Malaysia in November by President Barack Obama to bolster his position.

Nurul Izzah also said there was no basis for a Malaysian police investigation against her over charges contained in reports in pro-government newspapers that she attempted to buy stolen data on state investment fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), which is at the center of a scandal involving Najib.

She called the allegations an "attempt to vilify and to tarnish me and to deflect from the fact that \$700 million went to Najib's pocket and \$650 million went out and nobody knows where the money is."

She said she was sticking to her plan to leave Washington on Saturday to return to Malaysia, even though there was the risk of arrest.

"I think I have no choice - I mean, I will face it, fight back, as we have done before," she said.

A Wall Street Journal report in July claimed government investigators looking into 1MDB have found that nearly \$700 million was transferred into the prime minister's personal bank account.

Najib has denied taking any money from the debt-laden state fund or any other entity for personal gain. The country's anti-corruption unit later said the funds moved to Najib's accounts were a donation from an unidentified Middle East donor, and did not come from 1MDB.

Nurul said she was asking the U.S. administration to issue a "clear-cut demand for Anwar's release as a political prisoner."

"At the very least, he should be given access to surgery - a medical intervention is needed as soon as possible," she said.

'AUTHORITARIAN STREAK'

Anwar, a former finance minister and deputy prime minister, was jailed in February for five years for sodomizing a former male aide. He denies the charge, calling the case a conspiracy by Najib's government to cripple the opposition and end his political career.

Nurul said her father had a shoulder injury which had worsened due to a delay in treatment and it was now affecting his vertebrae, meaning that he required micro-surgery, or a shoulder replacement.

Nurul said she understood the U.S. desire to maintain good relations with Malaysia, which has an influential position as chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and is also a partner in the multi-national Trans-Pacific Partnership trade negotiations - the key economic plank of Obama's "rebalance" of U.S. focus to Asia in the face of a rising China.

However, she charged that Najib's treatment of the political opposition and promotion of Malay supremacy was encouraging radicalization and extremism and the United States should examine the effectiveness of the assistance it was providing the country to counter militancy.

"For me, if America understands its place in the world, it's very important for them to leverage and ensure that Najib reduces his authoritarian streak," she said.

Nurul said she was concerned that if the U.S. administration did not take a firmer line, Najib would be able to use Obama's presence at the Asian summit Malaysia will host in November "to deflect from his excesses, his troubles".

The U.S. State Department said this year is was "deeply disappointed" with Anwar's conviction and that it raised questions about the fairness of the Malaysian judicial system.

However, in June, Obama stopped short of calling for his release, saying he did not generally comment on legal processes in other countries.