Anifah: We had no role in Japan barring Anwar

By ROZANNA LATIFF AND ADRIAN LAI

BASELESS CLAIM: Wisma Putra says Japan has sovereign right to deny entry to convicted persons

KUALA LUMPUR: WISMA Putra has denied allegations that it had a hand in preventing opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from entering Japan.

Foreign Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman said Japanese authorities had invoked Article 5 of the country’s Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, which allows them the right to deny entry to any person who had previously been convicted or imprisoned for any crime in Japan or in any other country.

“The Japanese government has every right to deny entry to anyone whom they find undesirable and they are under no obligation to explain to us why they have decided to (exercise that right),” he told a press conference at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs here yesterday.

Anwar was stopped from entering Japan after landing at Narita International Airport on Sunday morning. In a blog posting later, Anwar said he was told by Japanese immigration authorities that he was barred because of his 1999 conviction for sodomy and corruption.

He said when pressed for further explanation, Japanese officials disclosed that the action was taken "because of a latest report" possibly made last year.

Anifah said the Malaysian embassy in Japan had made enquiries with authorities in Tokyo after Anwar accused Wisma Putra of having a role in the matter. He said Wisma Putra did not know of any reports on Anwar that could prevent him from entering Japan.

"Anwar’s conviction (in 1999) is public knowledge. Why would we need to submit a report to any country to stop him from travelling?"

Anifah said every country had the sovereign right to deny anyone entry, likening it to Malaysia’s recent decision to ban controversial Australian senator Nicholas Xenophon.

"I told the Australian foreign minister then that I did not owe him any explanation (for barring Xenophon). By the same token, I respect any other country to make their own decision on these matters. It's unthinkable... the idea that Wisma Putra or I might have any influence over what the Japanese government does."

Nevertheless, he said, the Malaysian government had still sought clarification on Anwar’s behalf, as was his right as a citizen.

"I do not see Anwar as an opposition leader, I see him as a citizen of Malaysia. As the foreign minister, I too wanted to find out why he was denied entry."
The Japanese government has yet to release a statement.

Tomoko Nagai, a spokesperson for the Japanese embassy in Malaysia, told the New Straits Times yesterday that the embassy was still waiting for a report from officials in Tokyo.