

Najib's diplomatic feat turns sour
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What could have been a diplomatic coup for Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak with a golfing session with US president Barack Obama turned sour after it coincided with Malaysia's worst floods in decades.

Najib teeing off with Obama on Christmas eve was meant to show the premier's close relationship with the leader of a superpower, but any sign of admiration quickly drained and was replaced with an outpouring of anger.

Najib managed to show off his diplomatic clout as his golfing session with Obama was splashed in the US media.

However, the subsequent angry responses in Malaysia was also quickly picked up the following day.

"A world leader is under fire for playing golf in Hawaii at a time of national crisis. Only this time, it's not President Obama," reported the Washington Post.

The US-based media picked up local reports of angry comments on Najib's Facebook page which urged the premier to return home to deal with the crisis.

The New York Times also picked up an Associated Press report that Najib was "under fire".

"Najib has come under fire for going on holidays in Hawaii, where he was seen golfing with President Barack Obama.

"People have posted messages on his Facebook page, urging him to return home as the flooding worsened," it said.

Managing international coverage

Even the regional US press had highlighted the anger at the prime minister.

"Facebook users told Najib not to be a prime minister in absentia during this time when the country needs him the most as the flood situation worsened in five states," reported Indianapolis Post.

The bad international publicity was made worse by Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin (right) who said there was "no need" for the prime minister to return home and that he deserved a break.

"The PM has worked very hard. Be fair to him. He's a human being too," he said on Thursday.

However, Najib quickly responded to the public outcry, posting a photograph of him on the phone with Muhyiddin on Facebook hours later.

"In the conversation, I asked that he step up the operation to distribute aid to flood victims," he said in the posting.

The posting, which garnered over 10,000 comments, did not help, as netizens mocked the prime minister for his golfing session.

'To be with the people'

A day after that, the Prime Minister's Office in a statement announced that Najib will be returning home to oversee the emergency response of flood-hit states.

"While I have been away, I have been in constant contact with the National Security Council and the National Disaster Management and Relief Committee, who have assured me that they are doing everything they can to help those who have been affected.

"But I want to see the situation for myself and be with the people," said Najib in the statement.

According to flight tracking website FlightRadar24, the prime minister's Airbus A319 aircraft with the call sign 9M-NAA departed Hawaii for Los Angeles, before arriving in Indianapolis at 6.52pm Malaysian time yesterday.

However, the aircraft remains in Indianapolis and it is unclear if Najib is using another aircraft to return to the country or that the signal from the jet has been turned off.

It is understood the premier will be flying directly into Kota Bharu and is expected to have arrived at noon today.

As of this morning, a total of 132,000 people have been displaced by the floods which is now affecting eight states and shows no signs of abating.