

Obama faces tricky situation in dealing with Najib
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US President Barack Obama will be arriving in Kuala Lumpur today and observers are closely watching how he will be dealing with what they described as a "diplomatic dilemma".

The Wall Street Journal quoted political observers as saying Obama must take into consideration US trade interest with Malaysia, while at the same time acknowledge that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak is embroiled in the billion-ringgit 1MDB and "donation" scandals.

Former US ambassador to Malaysia John Mallot reportedly said: "It will be a tightrope to walk. Obama needs to distance himself because Najib is tainted goods now... but we still have interests there."

Obama is expected to have a private meeting with Najib tonight and WSJ also quoted White House officials as saying that Obama would bluntly raise questions on the status of the political opposition in Malaysia and other elements of its democracy.

Describing the meeting as a tricky situation, a senior fellow at the Brookings Center for East Asia Policy Studies, Joseph Chinyong Liow, said some Malaysians would frame any Obama-Najib interaction as "an endorsement of sorts".

However, others believe that Obama will be able to avoid any potentially damaging diplomatic gaffes if he only focuses on policy issues affecting both countries.

'Censorship pressure'

University of Tasmania's Asia Institute head James Chin said: "Obama has been seen with people who are much nastier.

"As a world leader, you really can't avoid meeting with people with problems."

Obama's second official visit to Malaysia comes at a time when Najib is facing mounting pressure from impact of the RM2.6 billion “donation” scandal and alleged irregularities surrounding state-investment arm 1MDB.

In a separate report, WSJ highlighted the recent raid on [Malaysiakini](#) as yet another example of attempts at covering up reports unfavourable to Najib's administration.

The report quoted editors and activists who decried Putrajaya's crackdown on freedom of speech in relation to ongoing investigations linked to 1MDB.

In October, Human Rights Watch cited media crackdowns in a 143-page report about efforts to silence criticism.

Freedom House, a US-based rights group, gave Malaysia a score of 65 in its annual press freedom rankings for 2015.

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