

Don't condone Najib's excesses, Anwar tells Obama
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Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim, who faces a return to prison on controversial sodomy charges, is asking the United States to temper its enthusiasm for building ties with his country.

On a visit to Washington, Anwar welcomed the attention paid to Malaysia by President Barack Obama but said the administration needed to be careful not to be "condoning the excesses" of Prime Minister Najib Razak's government.

"Just because we have a prime minister coming here and agreeing with whatever Obama wants him to do or to say does not erase or protect him from the crimes committed at home," Anwar told AFP.

NONEAnwar visited Washington in April for a major summit on nuclear security and backed Obama in opposing any move by Iran to develop nuclear weapons.

Some Malaysian officials saw Najib's visit as a breakthrough after years of rocky ties. Veteran former leader Dr Mahathir Mohamad was a strident critic of US foreign policy, although the countries have long been major trading partners.

The Obama administration has put a renewed focus on Southeast Asia, believing it was overlooked under former president George W Bush, and on reaching out to the world's moderate Muslims.

"What do you mean by a moderate Muslim country? Does that mean you can detain people without trial, deny basic freedom, you can ill-treat and discriminate against religious minorities?" Anwar said.

"We can be very tolerant, we can condemn the Iranians - can that cover the stench in your backyard? I don't believe so."

'Political assassination'

Anwar is accused of sodomy by a 25-year-old former aide, who said Anwar propositioned him at an apartment in 2008.

Sodomy, even among consenting adults, is illegal in Malaysia. If convicted, Anwar could face up to 20 years imprisonment.

NONEAnwar, a 62-year-old father of six, previously spent six years in solitary confinement on separate sex and corruption counts after being sacked as deputy prime minister in 1998 following a falling out with Mahathir.

In prison, Anwar said he read the complete works of Shakespeare four times.

The Malaysian government says that the court is independent and obliged to pursue lawsuits filed by any individual.

But Anwar said the trial amounted to "political assassination" by Najib to prevent him from taking power. The opposition made major strides in 2008 elections, stunning the BN

coalition that has been in power for half a century.

Anwar has lost a series of legal maneuvers in his trial, including failing to win access to medical reports and to statements by his accuser.

Anwar in Washington DC

He said he appreciated support from the United States but found the Obama administration's overall record on human rights "disappointing."

"We expect them to do more than Bush - these people who believe in freedom, human rights, the rule of law," Anwar said.

Anwar met in Washington with senior policymakers including Kurt Campbell, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian affairs, who promised in April that the United States would closely scrutinise Anwar's trial.

Anwar was in the US capital at the invitation of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, where he delivered a lecture arguing that democracy was compatible with Islam in Southeast Asia.

In his public remarks, Anwar strongly criticised a former Malaysian government ban on non-Muslims using the word 'Allah' as a translation for 'God'.

A court struck down the ban on December 31, after which assailants attacked a number of churches.

"It's completely insane and ridiculous to suggest that you can impose on others, non-Muslims, a law denying them a right to call their God whatever name," Anwar said.

"This can only come from a ruling establishment or clique that is myopic, racist, clearly intolerant and undemocratic," he said.

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