

Clinton to meet Muhyiddin, Anwar
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US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was set tomorrow to meet top Malaysian officials as the Obama administration cultivates ties with the moderate Muslim-majority country.

NONEThe chief US diplomat is due to hold talks in Kuala Lumpur with Foreign Minister Anifah Aman and Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, who is standing in for a sick Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

She is also scheduled to meet opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, in a sign of continued US support for the charismatic figure who is fighting sodomy charges that threaten to see him jailed for up to 20 years.

Anwar, a former deputy premier who was sacked and jailed on separate sex and corruption counts a decade ago, says he is again the victim of a political conspiracy and fears he will not receive justice on the latest allegations.

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

As part of her bid to reach out to Muslims, Clinton will also visit the International Institute for Islamic Thought and Civilisation to field questions about US foreign policy in a programme broadcast on Malaysian television.

US officials said the audience will include mainly students but also members of civil society.

'Enormous progress on a range of issues'

Such events are part of so-called public diplomacy, where Clinton strives to make America's case before a larger audience than the usual leaders and diplomats she meets.

Malaysia is the fifth stop on an Asia tour that has taken Clinton to Guam, Vietnam, China and Cambodia. She is still to visit Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Australia and American Samoa.

"Few countries have come as far in terms of our bilateral relationship as the one between the United States and Malaysia," Clinton's top diplomat for Asia, Kurt Campbell, said before the tour began last Wednesday.

He cited "enormous progress on a range of issues - (nuclear) proliferation issues, political coordination, and strategic dialogue."

Malaysia is also important as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, an organization the Obama administration is trying to re-engage with after blaming the previous Bush administration for ignoring it.

Political relations were rocky when Malaysia was led by Mahathir Mohamad, who was known for his strident criticism of the West during his two-decade rule which ended when he stepped down in 2003.

The United States sometimes riled Malaysia with past calls to expand democratic freedoms.

- AFP

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