

**Anwar verdict could risk White House invite to Najib, report says**  
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The Federal Court's verdict on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim yesterday could cost Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak an invitation to the White House, the Associated Press reports.

The last time a Malaysian leader was invited to the White House was during the Bush administration in 2004, during Tun Abdullah Badawi's tenure.

Najib, on the other hand, had only met Obama in a sideline meeting, during the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington in 2010.

While Washington has expressed concerns over the verdict, the reaction this time was cautious, a far cry from its condemnation of Anwar's incarceration in the late 1990s, the report said.

This time, Anwar's jail term comes as Malaysia assumes chairmanship of Asean, the regional bloc bringing together 10 countries, the US considers important, it said.

In addition, Washington is eager to conclude the long-delayed Trans-Pacific Partnership deal, which Malaysia is a part of a series of negotiations.

The measured response from Washington can be understood against a backdrop of cooperation on several fronts, including in global counter-terrorism efforts where the US hopes to rope in a "moderate Muslim nation" like Malaysia, the report added.

"The measured US response reflected the delicate line Washington attempts to tread, criticising infringements on political freedom in Asia without sacrificing its strategic goals," it said, and cited National Security Council spokesperson Bernadette Meehan, who while expressing concerns about rule of law following Anwar's jailing, pledged US commitment to expand cooperation "on shared economic and security challenges".

US-Malaysia ties have improved after former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, known for his strong remarks against American policies, left office in 2003.

Ties are said to be the strongest since Najib assumed office in 2009, with Barack Obama becoming the first US president in decades to visit Malaysia last April.

Last December, photos of Najib and Obama in a round of golf, while sparking controversy back home over its timing during Malaysia's worst floods, also underlined the warm ties between the two leaders.

Anwar was yesterday sentenced to five years jail, after losing his appeal on a charge of sodomy involving his former aide, Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan. – February 11, 2015.

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