

5 reasons Obama should drop Najib as 'friend', says TIME

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The woes surrounding Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, particularly claims that billions of ringgit from state-owned investor fund 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) were channelled into his private bank accounts, should give world leaders pause in pursuing ties with Malaysia, says TIME in an online piece today.

The news portal said President Barack Obama should steer clear of Najib, unlike British Prime Minister David Cameron, who is scheduled to visit Malaysia this week, despite needing friends in Asean.

Obama became the first sitting president to visit Malaysia in more than four decades in April 2014 when Najib was facing allegations of links to the murder of a Mongolian translator and for exploiting the hudud issue pursued by an opposition party.

In December last year, while the east coast was inundated in the worst flooding in the country's history, Najib was photographed enjoying a round of golf with Obama in Honolulu.

Lately, he was hit by allegations by The Wall Street Journal that US\$700 million (RM2.67 billion) from companies linked to 1MDB was funnelled into his accounts.

Yesterday, Najib announced a Cabinet reshuffle and dropped Umno deputy president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as his deputy. Also removed was Attorney-General Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail, who is part of a special task force investigating 1MDB. The move is seen as a desperate attempt by Najib to remain in power.

Obama is scheduled to attend the next East Asia Summit hosted by Malaysia in November. The American president is also working overtime to ink the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement in which Malaysia is one of the parties.

Given the turmoil surrounding Najib, TIME has offered five reasons Obama should steer clear of the prime minister:

1. **1MDB.** Najib has threatened to sue WSJ over allegations that RM2.67 billion was funnelled into his bank accounts. The prime minister has denied using the funds personally but has not addressed the question why the money went into his account ahead of the 2013 general election.

2. **Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim** remains in jail on a second sodomy conviction on February 10. The five-year sentence is seen as "politically motivated".

3. **Hudud.** Najib's party – Umno – is supporting PAS's attempt to implement hudud in the Islamist party-ruled state of Kelantan. The hudud push has already led to the break-up of opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat, especially after PAS adopted a motion to sever ties with DAP at its June muktamar. Umno's support is to be seen as

political expediency to create a rift in PR.

4. **Altantuya Shaariibuu.** Najib is implicated in the murder of Mongolian Altantuya. Former police commando Sirul Azhar Umar, who was Najib's former bodyguard, claimed he was "under orders" to kill Altantuya in 2006. The prime minister has denied any knowledge of the murder.

5. **Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA).** The Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) was passed by the Dewan Rakyat on April 7, showing that Najib has backtracked from the liberal, reformist policies he had touted in his first term in office. POTA replaced the Internal Security Act and contained harsh features such as imprisonment without trial for two years with the option of multiple extensions.

Najib also reneged on a 2013 election promise to scrap the Sedition Act. He, in fact, introduced amendments which worsened the maximum jail term from three to 20 years. – July 29, 2015.

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