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National

Obama banks on happy homecoming on Irish leg of European tour

President to visit town of 19th-century ancestor

Cameron to hold security talks during London leg

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The White House has predicted a lively debate about the president's origins on the opening day of next week's trip to Europe. But it is sure to be a lot friendlier than the recent "birther" row.

Barack Obama's tour of Ireland, the UK, France and Poland kicks off on Monday in Dublin but he then heads for the County Offaly town of Moneygall, from where his mother's family hail. A White House spokesman, Ben Rhodes, said Obama was looking forward to seeing his roots. "It is a homecoming of sorts," he said.

Rhodes added that the person researching Obama's family history was able to trace his mother's side back to Moneygall. "I believe we can confirm it is his great-great-great grandfather," Rhodes said.

That relative, Falmouth Kearney, is in the parish records and is understood to have left for America in 1850. His great-great granddaughter Ann Dunham married Obama's father. Rhodes said there could be people in Moneygall who share those blood ties. "I expect it to be a robust topic of discussion," he said.

The town has been spruced up for the occasion, with fresh paint and flower-boxes. The president is expected to stop for a drink in the pub and a new Obama cafe is also scheduled to open.

The main policy speech of his European tour will be on Wednesday when he addresses both houses of parliament.

The main theme will be the evolving transatlantic relationship, dealing mainly with Nato, and the way the US and Europe confront a series of global challenges together, from Afghanistan to Libya.

Obama's first day in the UK, on Tuesday, is dominated by a visit to Buckingham Palace, with a state dinner in the evening. He will see David Cameron and Ed Miliband on the same day, and hold a fuller meeting with Cameron on Wednesday, with Afghanistan, Libya and counter-terrorism on the agenda.

One of the main aims of the trip is to try to improve relations with Europe after an awkward start when European governments grumbled that Obama was more interested in Asia than Europe.

Cameron will try to introduce an element of informality to Obama's state visit when he hosts a lunchtime barbecue in the Downing Street garden on Wednesday.

The prime minister wants to avoid a repeat of the formal approach adopted by Gordon Brown when Obama visited No 10 as the Democratic nominee for president in the summer of 2008.

Nick Clegg, who will attend the barbecue, was told that protocol meant the only way he could meet Obama one-on-one would be as leader of the Liberal Democrats. The three main party leaders are always offered a bilateral meeting with a visiting head of state during a formal state visit. Clegg decided that he would like to meet the president as deputy prime minister.

From the UK, Obama heads to a G8 meeting in Deauville, France, and finishes at the end of the week in Poland.

Rain dance Salisbury festival begins



Dancers perform a dress rehearsal ahead of their performance at the opening night of Salisbury International Arts Festival Photograph: Matt Cardy/Getty Images