

PM rubbishes claims he's beholden to US

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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak today rubbished claims that Malaysia is beholden to the United States.

If he was indeed beholden to the superpower, Najib said, the remains of Flight MH17 victims would not have returned home two days ago.

"If we were beholden to the US, then we wouldn't have developed an understanding with (Donetsk rebel leader Alexander) Borodai.

"And if I had not developed this understanding, I do not think the MH17 victims would have been received by us two days ago," he said at the Malaysian Student Leaders Summit in Kuala Lumpur today.

Further stressing that he was not beholden to the United States, Najib said if this was so, he would not have visited Gaza - the Palestinian territory which is under siege by Israel, a staunch US ally.

Najib was responding to a question posed by a student on which of the two global rivals Malaysia should choose to back - the US or China.

The prime minister said that the matter was not like "choosing a football club".

"We don't have to make a choice, we should look at the strengths of both countries.

"The US has a big market, (along) with its technology, and it has some of the best educational institutions in the world. Why do we need to confront the US?

"China, on the other hand, is our largest trading partner and the fastest growing economy in the world," he said.

As such, Najib said, it was important to adopt a "principle-based foreign policy", as well as a "pragmatic" one.

Najib's policies have come under intense criticism in recent weeks, in particular from former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who announced that he no longer supported Najib.

An extraordinary year

In his speech to the student leaders earlier, Najib said 2014 had been "one of the most

extraordinary years" for the country, with its twin tragedies - the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines (MAS) Flight MH370 and the downing of Flight MH17.

However, he said he felt a sense of pride in how Malaysians had united in public prayer over the tragedies.

"It was a poignant moment when the caskets passed in front of me, when the country stood still for one minute. I felt pride in how we stood as one," he said.

Aug 22 was declared the nation's day of mourning, during which the first ever ceremonial military honours were bestowed on civilians.

The remains of 20 of the 43 Malaysians who were on board MH17, which was shot down over Ukraine, were received at the KL International Airport on Friday.

Those at the KLIA observed a one-minute silence at 10.54am as a sign of respect for the departed.

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