

Mosque controversy hurt US image: Najib
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The controversy over building an Islamic cultural center steps from the site of the 9/11 attacks in New York has hurt America's image among Muslims, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak said Sunday.

Speaking on CNN television, Najib said that Muslim nations courted by US President Barack Obama since taking office have been put off by what they view as bellicose rhetoric and growing hatred toward Muslims in the United States because of controversy over the center.

"Islamophobia... is a real concern to the Muslim world," the prime minister said.

"I think Muslims have a sense that they're not so welcome," he added.

"They feel there is a change in the attitude of Americans toward Muslims and it's important for us to get back on track."

The proposed center, to be located two blocks from the site of the 2001 attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people, fueled vehement protests from those who said the site should not house a Muslim community center because the 9/11 attacks were launched in the name of Islam.

The center, which became a lightning rod for some rightwing Americans in the run-up to last Tuesday's midterm elections, sparked a national debate on the place of Islam among the numerous religions practiced in the United States.

- AFP

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