

NEW STRAITS TIMES

DATE: 16/11/2009

# Najib: Obama appreciates our role as peacekeeper

NST-16/11/2009

SINGAPORE: United States President Barack Obama yesterday expressed great appreciation for Malaysia's contribution to maintaining regional peace and security.

Obama cited the role played by Malaysia in tackling terrorism, as the intermediary in resolving the conflict in southern Philippines, maintaining security in the Straits of Malacca and checking human trafficking to third countries. He disclosed this at a meeting between Asean and US leaders at the Shangri-La Hotel here.

This was disclosed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak at a media conference after the conclusion of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation leaders' meeting at the Istana.

Najib said the Asean-US Leaders' Summit was historic as it was the first time that such a meeting was held, and it was obvious that the US was keen to forge closer relations with Asean.

He said Obama had stated that he intended to enhance relations with Asean through cooperation in various areas including trade, investment, technology, education, the teaching and learning of the English language and continuing the Peace Corps programme.

He said Obama wanted to have close contact with Asean and hoped that the 10-nation grouping would become an inclusive economic region.

Najib also said that the US wished to hold dialogues with

Muslim countries and asked for Malaysia's help to organise inter-faith dialogues.

Obama also stated that the US wanted to resolve the conflict in West Asia no matter how difficult it would be, said Najib.

The prime minister described the statement as a good start for the Muslim world.

On the Myanmar issue, which was also raised at the Asean-US meeting, Najib said Obama wanted to see the return of democracy and the release of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Najib said Myanmar did not give any response when the issue of Suu Kyi's release was raised by Obama, but it welcomed the US engagement policy.

Asked on Obama's stand on free trade, the prime minister said although the US president was facing pressure in his country to defend its trade, Obama's tone showed that he rejected protectionism and accepted free trade.

Najib said Obama's approach might be different but his principles on free trade remained the same and he gave his commitment to the matter.

After the media conference, Najib and his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, visited the Sultan of Kelantan who has been receiving medical treatment at the Mount Elizabeth Hospital for the past few months, before leaving for Kuala Lumpur. — Bernama