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Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak attending the Asean-China Commemorative Summit in Nusa Dua, Bali, yesterday. With him are International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed (left) and Foreign Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman. PERDANA

Praise from US president

APPRECIATION Obama hails Malaysia's role as a progressive Islamic nation

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United States President Barack Obama yesterday highlighted Washington's appreciation towards Malaysia's role as a progressive Islamic nation in international affairs and hoped both nations could enhance co-operation for world peace and stability.

In his meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak here, Obama mentioned Malaysia's participation in reconstruction efforts in war-torn Afghanistan, where Kuala Lumpur is assisting in providing medical personnel.

Najib said there were possibly other areas Malaysia could contribute, including in providing training for the Afghan police force which is undergoing a formation process.

Both leaders met on the sidelines of the ongoing Asean Summit and Related Summits.

Malaysia's strong efforts in en-

surging non-proliferation of nuclear weapons was also mentioned by the Obama and he hoped that Kuala Lumpur would consider joining the international Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

"Although we have not decided whether to join the PSI, I told the president that the government will never allow Malaysia to be used as a transit point for illicit transportation of any materials that can be used to produce weapons of mass destruction," Najib told a news conference yesterday.

He said Malaysia had tightened its laws and now had the power to impose harsh punishment on any parties found guilty of illegally transporting such materials.

Obama also hoped that Malaysia

would continue to participate in the Trans-Pacific Partnership programme until its initiatives are achieved by July next year. That would enable Malaysia and the US to widen the Free Trade Agreement, Najib said.

He said he also thanked Obama for allowing 50 English teachers from the US to serve in Malaysia.

The teachers who form an important part of the government's efforts to improve command of the language in the country will serve in Pahang, Terengganu and Johor.

Both leaders also spoke about the delicate maritime security issue in the South China Sea, concerning the overlapping claims made by three Asean nations on a group of atolls in the area.

"It is a challenging issue and must be solved by peaceful means, guided by international laws."

Palestine was also a subject in the meeting, where Najib told Obama that the state's future remained hazy and no clear solution was visible within the near future.

Najib also said that settlement of the Palestinian issue was important and the Islamic world was waiting for new and positive developments in its relations with Washington.

This is the first time Obama is attending the Asean-US leaders meeting, one of the related summits held alongside the 19th Asean Summit.

The two leaders last met in a bilateral meeting in April last year, when Najib attended the inaugural Nuclear Security Summit in Washington.

Yesterday, the prime minister also attended the 14th Asean-China Summit; the Asean-Japan Summit; the Asean-Korea Summit; the Asean-plus-3 Summit and the third Asean-US Summit.

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Datuk Seri Najib Razak