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NEWS

21-gun salute for US president

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TOUCHDOWN: Threat of rain clears as Obama receives warm welcome

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MALAYSIA rolled out the red carpet and bid a warm welcome to the 44th president of the United States, Barack Obama, who arrived here yesterday for a three-day state visit.

The president arrived via the Boeing 747 presidential jetliner, Air Force One, which landed at the Royal Malaysian Air Force Base in Subang at 4.50pm.

Clad in a light blue shirt under a dark suit, Obama showed no sign of fatigue from his visits to Japan and South Korea, and appeared spirited as he briskly strode down the aircraft stairs onto the red carpet.

He was greeted in a welcoming ceremony by Foreign Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman and Youth and Sports Minister Khairy Jamaluddin.

Present were Malaysian ambassador to the US Datuk Dr Awang Adek Hussin and Special Envoy to the US Datuk Seri Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis.

Khairy, via his Twitter account, said he had greeted Obama with "Selamat datang, Mr President" (Welcome, Mr President), to which Obama replied, "Terima kasih" (Thank you).

This was Obama's first time on Malaysian soil and only the second



US President Barack Obama inspecting the guard of honour during a welcoming ceremony at Parliament Square in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Pic by Effendy Rashid



visit by a sitting US president since Lyndon B. Johnson's in 1966, 48 years ago.

The significance of the event was not lost on the scores of Malaysians who had gathered near the airbase, some since 11am, to catch a glimpse

of the well-known aircraft and its equally famous passenger.

Obama then flashed a grin and waved to the crowd before he was whisked away by US Secret Service agents in his bulletproof presidential limousine, dubbed "The Beast", for an official state welcoming ceremony at Parliament Square.

The square was abuzz with activity prior to his arrival as Malaysian police and US security personnel made last minute checks to ensure top-notch safety.

Secret Service agents, clad in their trademark dark suits and sunglasses, were the epitome of seriousness as they meticulously combed the area and examined the

belongings of media personnel.

Police K-9 units were also deployed to scour the vicinity for security threats, while government and embassy officials were on site to oversee logistics for the state welcome.

Although rain had earlier threatened to dampen the outdoor proceedings, clear skies greeted the president and his entourage as they arrived at parliament grounds at 5.37pm.

The presidential limousine was escorted by a motorcade of more than 20 vehicles, comprising his staff and security detail.

He was greeted by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah and Prime Min-

ister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

The trio proceeded to the royal dais where the US national anthem *The Star-Spangled Banner* and Malaysia's *Negaraku* were played, with the customary 21-gun salute accorded to the visiting president.

Obama then proceeded to review the guard of honour comprising four officers and 103 men from the 1st battalion of the Royal Malay Regiment, led by Major Amriza Mohd Asshari.

Present were Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Dr Ali Hamsa, cabinet ministers and deputy ministers, senior government officials, ambassadors, embassy officials and senior dignitaries.

Obama then exchanged greetings with Muhyiddin and other dignitaries before leaving at 5.52pm.

His motorcade proceeded to the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Bukit Bintang, where the president will be staying, before attending a banquet at Istana Negara later.

Obama is expected to head to Putrajaya today for talks with Najib followed by a joint press conference.

Prior to that, he is expected to meet US embassy staff at the embassy grounds in Jalan Tun Razak, before making a private visit to the National Mosque here.

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