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## Embrace diversity and grow stronger, says Obama

*The star - 28/4/2014*

**PUTRAJAYA:** US President Barack Obama says Malaysia has the potential to unleash a new era of growth.

"This is by virtue of the economic progress that is evident to all who visit here for the first time and by virtue of Prime Minister (Datuk Seri) Najib's (Tun Razak) goal of making the economy more competitive," the President told a joint press conference with Najib here.

Obama said Malaysia should draw strength from its people from different ethnic groups, backgrounds, faiths and holding different political beliefs.

"In the US, embracing that diversity and upholding the rights and dignity of all our citizens had always been strong and I believe it can make Malaysia even stronger as well."

Obama said both leaders had agreed to heighten US-Malaysia ties when he welcomed Najib to Washington four years ago and that there's been closer cooperation every since, saying: "Today, we're formalising our efforts in a comprehensive partnership."

He pointed out that this cooperation could be seen in their response to the disappearance of flight MH370, adding that he had also discussed with Najib the lessons to be learnt from the tragedy. Obama also acknowledged Malaysia's leadership role in the world stage.

"As a founding member of Asean and the East Asia Summit (EAS), Malaysia is already a critical leader in building institutions that can enhance regional prosperity and security," he said.

He said the US agreed with Asean's and Malaysia's view that disputes should be resolved peacefully, without intimidation or coercion and all nations should abide by international rules and laws.

Obama said the time he spent in the region as a child had shaped his understanding of the world and had broadened his vision.

"I look forward to a new generation of Americans getting that same experience here in Malaysia," he said.