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'We must keep Asean safe'

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I.S. THREAT:

Malaysia will work with US, other nations to fight violence, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR



Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Najib Razak** looks on as United States President **Barack Obama** greets Deputy Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi** after Najib and Obama's bilateral meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Pic by Yazit Razali

THE Asean region is not immune to violence and terrorism and efforts must be made to make this region safer, said Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

The prime minister said there were groups that announced they were aligned to the Islamic State and Malaysia had made clear its stand against IS and the group's ideology.

"It is evil and against Islam. We will work very closely with the United States and other like-minded countries to make things safer and counteract any form of violence," he told reporters in a joint press conference after a one-hour bilateral meeting with US President Barack Obama on the eve of the 27th Asean Summit at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre here.

Najib said both countries agreed to make Malaysia a counter messaging centre to address violence and extremism.

"It's not only military solutions that is required, but to sway the hearts and minds of these people (as well). And this is why it is important for us to present the counter narratives, to present the authentic and the true Islam.

Obama echoed Malaysia's views on the need to counter terrorism and said over the last few years, the US had developed very strong relationships around countering terrorism issues.

Malaysia, like Indonesia, he said.



was a Muslim-majority country that represented tolerance and peace.

Obama said Malaysia's voice was critical in the debates taking place internationally regarding terrorism.

"And Malaysia is extremely helpful in countering the destructive and perverse narratives that develop.

Obama lauded Malaysia's decision to host a centre that used all the tools of social media in the engagement with scholars and clerics to counter such violent narratives, which he described as "extremely important".

On the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement, Najib said he told the US president that Malaysia had crossed the finishing line.

The prime minister said he explained to Obama about the domestic processes involved, including the presenting of the agreement to cabinet next week and to Parliament in a special session in January.

"We hope, with the support and approval of Parliament, the TPP will

be ratified or put into operation within two years.

"We believe it (the TPP) will create the kind of increase in trade, innovation and investment as well as set standards with respect to labour and the environment," Najib said.

Obama said he hoped Malaysia would ratify the agreement soon and pledged to work on the issues that must be addressed in the agreement.

"Malaysia has started to make reforms like countering human trafficking and other issues that are embedded in the agreement. So, we will continue to work with Malaysia on that front," Obama said.

On the South China Sea issue, Najib said Obama told him the US' position on the matter.

"I also explained to the president our position, which is consistent with the rule of law. We hope that the area of tension will not escalate and (hope we will) be able to find a negotiated settlement that is consonant with the principle of international law and respects the rights of big and small nations."

Obama said the US strongly believed in the need to apply the rule of law and Asean had to ensure that basic rules applied because the foundation of its extraordinary growth lay in the free flow of commerce and freedom of navigation.

Najib said both countries discussed the need to seal a deal during the United Nations climate change talks in Paris on Nov 30.

"Malaysia is committed to find a deal. If necessary, we will revive our position to ensure that we do not fail in Paris. We owe this to the world."

The prime minister said he and Obama had a discussion about general developments in Malaysia.

"I explained the current situation in Malaysia. The president also raised some of his views and we take into account some of his views and concerns, but Malaysia is committed to reform and we are committed to ensuring, at the same time, peace and stability in the country."

Najib said his meeting with Obama was good and appreciated the strengthening of the partnership.