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# 'Summit shows US values Asean ties'

**RELAXED MEETING:**  
Topping the agenda will be economic and regional security issues



Reporting from the U.S.

## SUNNYLANDS (CALIFORNIA)

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ON the eve of the historic United States-Asean Summit, Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday spoke of its significance for both America and Southeast Asia, and said it was a clear reflection of Asean's strategic importance.

"It is a significant meeting for both Asean and the US," the prime minister said in a message yesterday (Sunday in California), ahead of the summit on Monday and Tuesday.

"It clearly represents a recognition by the US on the diplomatic, economic and strategic importance of Asean," said Najib, who is in the 80ha California desert estate here for the summit.

US President Barack Obama is welcoming Najib and nine other Asean leaders to the estate in Rancho Mirage for the first US-Asean Summit on American soil as part of Washington's effort to sharpen the US foreign policy focus on the fast-growing Asean economy.

Topping the agenda will be economic and regional security issues.

Najib said this would be the first summit after the elevation of dialogue relations between the US and Asean to a "strategic partnership" in November last year in Kuala Lumpur during Obama's visit.

"The summit will provide the leaders with the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to the principles underlying the strategic partnership and to provide guidance on the way forward," he said.

Najib arrived in Los Angeles on Thursday for a six-day working visit to California. While there, he met Malaysian students before heading to Sunnylands, and then to San Francisco to visit the Apple Inc headquarters and to meet investors and fund managers before flying home.

The summit venue, the Sunnylands estate, has welcomed many of the rich and famous in the past. They include Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope, Fred Astaire, Bing Crosby, Warren Buffet, Bill Gates and Queen Elizabeth II.

Obama is increasingly using the estate to conduct US foreign policy talks, this time with leaders from Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Sunnylands' nine-hole golf course is also considered one of the country's best.

The gathering on Monday and Tuesday will be another "no-tie/no jacket" summit, not unlike Obama's outings with China President Xi Jinping and Jordan's King Abdullah II at the same venue, US diplomats said.

Ben Rhodes, the president's



A Californian newspaper highlighting the Sunnylands summit on its front page.

deputy national security adviser, was quoted as saying that Obama enjoys having more free-flowing talks with fellow leaders "out of the bubble" of the White House in Washington.

Sunnylands "lends itself to kind of a stepped-back, broader strategic set of discussions in a very peaceful setting in which the leaders can get to know one another and really try to dig in over an extended period of time in a way that you couldn't in a one-hour meeting here at the White House", Rhodes said.

Analysts said the Sunnylands summit shows that Asean leaders are important to Obama, even as his second, four-year term as president is nearing its end.

"The White House sees Sunnylands as very special treatment... where the president of the US is leaving Washington and he's going to spend two full days exclusively focused on these leaders and these individuals," said Murray Hiebert, analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.