

**Najib: Island disputes must be managed rationally**  
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OVERLAPPING claims in the South China Sea between several Asean members and China will take a long time to resolve and one of the challenges will be to ensure that there is continued peace and stability in the region.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the disputes must be managed in a rational way.

"We should not do anything to exacerbate the problem but if we proceed in a rational and constructive way, the complex issue can be managed and resolved.

"But it will take time," Najib said at the end of the East Asia Summit (EAS) here yesterday.

The summit was attended by leaders of 10 Asean countries and partners, including Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and US President Barack Obama.

The Prime Minister admitted that there were differences of opinion during the meeting on the issue but that the atmosphere during the discussion was calm.

"The overall objectives are clear and EAS should be a forum for us to strengthen cooperation and the collaboration is very evident.

"You can expect in a relation between any countries that there will be differences in opinion. You can't expect everything to be problem-free. It's up to us to manage the differences for a desired outcome," he added.

The dispute over islands in the South China Sea had been widely reported with some countries warning that the row could damage "peace and stability" in Asia.

Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam have territorial claims in the area and have been trying to get China to sit down and discuss the Code of Conduct (CoC), which comprised elements of conflict prevention and management for the maritime territorial dispute.

The legally binding CoC is intended as a mechanism to implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DoC) in the South China Sea that Beijing signed and Asean member nations agreed to in 2002.

The Prime Minister said that once Asean could get China to formal discussions on the CoC, it would be a very positive move on confidence building in the region.

"There are some indications when Wen said China considers the CoC as a logical extension of the DoC. Hopefully, this will be translated into their willingness to discuss with Asean," he said.

Najib also expressed satisfaction with the overall outcome of the 21st Asean and Related Summit, during which the leaders adopted the Asean Human Rights Declaration and the launch of Negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership , an initiative involving the 10 Asean members and its partners Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.

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