

Obama Charms Asean Youths With Wit, Laidback Personality

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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 20 (Bernama) -- United States President Barack Obama not only charmed a gathering of ASEAN youths with his wit and laidback personality, but also impressed them with his "apa khabar?" (how are you?) greeting at a townhall session at the Taylor's University Lakeside Campus in Subang Jaya near here today.

At the session with the alumni of Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI), after he had flown in to Malaysia to attend ASEAN-related summits, the president had his audience in stitches with some of his answers to the questions posed.

Clad in a dark blue suit, Obama greeted the youths with "apa khabar?", and the youths, who had been patiently waiting for him from noon, responded with thunderous claps and excited cheers.

During the question-and-answer session, the US President asked an Indonesian youth "Apa Khabar?" and "Dari Mana?" (Where are you from?), Malay language words which he must have obviously picked up during his childhood stay in Jakarta.

To set an informal ambience, he removed his jacket after speaking for a short while and said in jest: "Let me take off my coat. It is already warm in here and I also anticipate some tough questions."

The session, which started at 4.20 pm, lasted more than 90 minutes as Obama listened attentively and answered the questions, which ranged from climate change to politics to trade deals and the role of youths.

Obama also had the audience in stitches when he requested the youths to stop calling him old.

"The first thing I want from young people is to stop calling me old. Come on, you hurt my feelings," he said in jest after a Cambodian youth asked him for a sage advice since the US leader is already entering his senior age.

YSEALI, which was mooted by Obama two years ago, has more than 55,000 members in all the 10 ASEAN member countries.

The US President is in Malaysia for the second time. He made a state visit to the country in April last year.

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