

Malaysia calls Islamic State evil, Barack Obama vows no safe haven for killers

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Kuala Lumpur: President Barack Obama promised today that Islamic extremists would find no safe haven anywhere, while the leader of Muslim-majority Malaysia branded the Islamic State group as a "new evil" that has blasphemed the religion, and urged world leaders to confront it forcefully.

Obama and Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak were speaking separately at an Asian summit taking place against the backdrop of recent violence including the bombing of a Russian jet over Egypt, a suicide bombing in Beirut, a series of attacks in Paris, the slaying of a Malaysian hostage by militants in the Philippines and Friday's attack on a Mali hotel.

Najib said he had planned to begin his speech by talking about the achievements of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, of which he is the current chairman.

"But the events of recent days and weeks have cast a shadow over us all," he said in remarks to open the ASEAN summit. "Be assured that we stand with you against this new evil that blasphemes against the name of Islam."

"The perpetrators ... do not represent any race, religion or creed. They are terrorists and should be confronted as such, with the full force of the law," Najib said in a stirring speech that repeatedly emphasized the tolerance of Islam.

He also cautioned that a military solution alone will not be enough to defeat terrorism. "It is the ideology propagated by these extremists that is the cause of this sadistic violence. ... We must not lose sight of the fact that the ideology itself must be exposed as the lie that it is and vanquished. For it is not Islamic. It cannot be."

Later, Obama spoke at a business conference on the sidelines of the summit, and referred to the Mali attack that left 20 people dead, including one American.

"With allies and partners, the United States will be relentless to those who target our citizens. We will continue to root out terrorist networks. We will not allow these killers to have a safe haven," Obama said, adding that the world is determined "to push back on the hateful ideologies that fuel this terrorism."

Obama and Najib will attend a larger summit of 18 Asia-Pacific countries on Sunday. Among them are Australia, Brunei, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, Vietnam and Malaysia, which are all members of a new U.S.-led free trade agreement known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership that the Obama administration had pushed hard to achieve.

"This is a prime example of America and our partners working together to shape the world we want for future generations," Obama said.

- AP