

Jiang positive to infrastructure tax proposal, says Dr M

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**From Ahmad A. Talib
in Boao, Hainan**

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said President Jiang Zemin of China gave a positive response to the proposed infrastructure tax.

The Prime Minister said he had first discussed the idea with Jiang during their bilateral talks on Monday.

"He was quite positive about the whole thing," Dr Mahathir told a Press conference after delivering his keynote address at the Boao Forum for Asia here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was also asked his views on the proposed tax, especially if rich countries were the ones imposing conditions on poor recipient countries.

"It's up to us to design the structure of the tax. We can have our conditions, too. Poor countries, too, have a right to such infrastructure. The rich countries, after having exploited the poor, must return some of the wealth," he said.

During his keynote address, Dr Mahathir proposed that an infrastructure tax where

rich countries would be taxed based on a sliding scale be set up.

Funds from this would then be used to finance the construction of infrastructure projects in poor countries.

Asked what the Boao Forum would consider as priority issues to be discussed, Dr Mahathir said issues such as globalisation and the international financial structure were major items.

Asked how Western countries would look at his proposal, Dr Mahathir said: "It's up to me to continue to push for these ideas. I hope that those who don't like me or Malaysia would still consider the ideas based on merits.

"In fact, some Western people are beginning to come around to our way of thinking, especially on the manner with which we tackled our financial crisis following the attack on our currency."

In his speech, Dr Mahathir was confident that Asia and Asians would have a great 21st century.

"We are not going to dominate the world. But Asians must play a big role in the creation of this century of the world," he said.