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PM: SOVEREIGNTY NOT COMPROMISED

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Najib makes no apologies for wanting to build world-class infrastructure in Malaysia

BEIJING

MALAYSIA'S support for China's One Belt, One Road initiative, or OBOR, as well as its agreement to projects under it will not in any way impact the country's sovereignty.

Stressing this, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said he made no apologies for wanting to build world-class infrastructure for Malaysia that would, with local ownership being preserved, open up huge swathes of the country, bringing more trade and opportunity to the people, thousands of new jobs, improved living standards and prosperity.

"It may seem ridiculous... But, there are some opposition politicians in my country who say we are selling our sovereignty by agreeing to such projects," he

said in a commentary published in the *South China Morning Post* on "Why Malaysia supports China's Belt and Road" yesterday.

Najib is here, joining 27 world leaders, for the two-day Belt and Road Forum for International Co-operation (BRF) to be opened by Chinese President Xi Jinping today.

According to Najib, in the days of the old Silk Road, those who had wisdom knew that open minds, and borders open to trade, did not compromise sovereignty, but were in the interests of all countries.

"The same is true today, and we welcome investment from all our friends and partners, just as Malaysia, as a seafaring, outward-looking nation, proud of its diversity, moderation and tolerance, has always traded with and invested in countries around the

world, including China."

He said while there were those sceptical of the phrase "win-win cooperation" from China, South-east Asian nations could see the truth in it going by some of OBOR's game-changing infrastructure projects.

"For example, the China-Laos railway; the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway; the Nakhon Ratchasima-Bangkok high-speed railway; and, for us in Malaysia, the East Coast Rail Link.

"The rail line will drive connectivity and economic growth for Malaysia's underdeveloped east coast, and act as a land-bridge enabling cost- and time-efficient transport of goods between Africa, the Middle East and Asia."

Najib said as Asia continued to rise and took a greater place on

the world stage, this model would ensure it did so as friends to all.

"This is the Asian Century, so let us ensure that it is marked not by the strife, wars and enmity of past centuries.

“And with good reason. A recent report co-authored by the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania named Malaysia as the best country to invest in.”

DATUK SERI NAJIB RAZAK

"Let us instead be true to our values of mutual respect, peace, harmony and non-interference in the affairs of sovereign states."

He said that even though it had only been a few months since his last visit to China, the warmth and friendliness experienced would not be forgotten.

During that time, he said, Malaysia signed agreements and understandings amounting to RMI44 billion, which was a sign of the great confidence Chinese investors had in Malaysia.

"And with good reason. A recent report co-authored by the

Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania named Malaysia as the best country to invest in.

"Although my visit was only a very short time ago, we have already seen results. In March, for instance, Jack Ma of Alibaba and I launched the world's first Digital Free Trade Zone in Kuala Lumpur.

"This will be a catalyst for e-commerce and small- and medium-sized enterprises, and will be the premier hub for global and local Internet-based companies targeting Southeast Asia."

He said the littoral mission ships Malaysia agreed to buy from China, would provide jobs in both Malaysia and China — as the first two ships were being built in each country — as well as knowledge transfer to Malaysia.

"That is truly an example of win-win cooperation, and if it is on that basis that the Belt and Road initiative continues to develop, we should all welcome it. We should all contribute to and participate in it.

"And we should all wish it every success." **By Chok Suat Ling**