

DR M TO SHARE VIEWS ON BRI

Forum seeks to build consensus among participants

BEIJING

WITH the conclusion of protracted negotiations over Malaysia-China projects, attention will now be on building a sturdy foundation of non-interference and mutually beneficial development for the two trading partners during the prime minister's visit here.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here yesterday to join some 36 world leaders and participants from 130 countries at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF) at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The two-day forum, starting tomorrow, carries the theme "Belt and Road Cooperation: Shaping a Brighter Shared Future" and is the second one since the vision for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was shared by Xi in 2013.

The first BRF, touted a dazzling diplomatic success, was in 2017.

All eyes will be on Dr Mahathir's visit, coming soon after the resumption of construction for the multi-billion ringgit East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project after months of negotiations.

The Bandar Malaysia project, shelved in May 2017, has also been revived.

The way Malaysia has dealt with China, by bringing what is seen as lopsided agreements back to the negotiating table, is seen as an important example especially for other Southeast



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Asian countries in approaching BRI projects.

At a press conference with the Malaysian media here yesterday, Malaysian embassy in China charge d'affaires ad interim Nuryante Mohd Yazid said Dr Mahathir had been accorded the honour to share his views at a high-level meeting and Leaders' Roundtable based on the theme "Strengthening Policy Synergy and Building Closer Partnership" during the forum.

"Dr Mahathir's views on the BRI is much anticipated not just by Beijing but also other participating nations.

"Chinese and international media have slated interviews with Dr Mahathir during this visit."

The forum will seek to build consensus among Belt and Road participants as the ambitious scheme reaches its sixth year while facing numerous setbacks and international suspicion.

China has refuted claims that the project creates debt traps for participants, especially developing countries.

There were concerns initially that issues relating to Chinese projects in Malaysia were standing in the way of good relations between the two countries.



Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad being welcomed at the Beijing international airport yesterday. With him is Foreign Affairs Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah (right). BERNAMA PIC

But Malaysia has been consistently committed to being part of BRI. Recognising the necessity of accepting Chinese investment, Dr Mahathir has signalled clearly since Pakatan Harapan came into power last year of Malaysia's desire to work constructively with China.

It, however, wants more transparently negotiated Belt and Road investments.

In this regard, major agreements are expected to be inked during the visit, Dr Mahathir's second to China since PH swept into power. He had seven official visits to China during his first

premiership of 22 years.

Dr Mahathir will be accompanied by his wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, and a high-level delegation comprising cabinet ministers and senior government officials.

Economic Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Azmin Ali, Transport Minister Anthony Loke and Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir will be speaking at thematic forums and a chief executive officer conference held in conjunction with BRF, said Nuryante.

China remains Malaysia's largest trading partner for 10 con-

secutive years, with trade growing 8.1 per cent to RM313.8 billion last year.

This, according to the International Trade and Industry Ministry constituted 16.7 per cent of Malaysia's total trade.

Nuryante said all 10 Asean leaders would take part in the forum's high-level meeting at Beijing's National Convention Centre and a Leaders' Roundtable at Yanqi Lake in the suburb of Huairou.

A joint communique outlining the roadmap ahead for Belt and Road participants will be issued at the end of the roundtable.