

# PM LAUDS CHINA'S BELT, ROAD INITIATIVE

All countries, including Malaysia, stand to gain with rising prosperity, says Dr M



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**BEIJING**

**T**UN Dr Mahathir Mohamad joined a parade of world leaders yesterday for the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF), in a clear show of the country's commitment and support for China's ambitious move to redefine the global economy.

The prime minister was accorded the honour of presenting a speech at the opening, where he expressed his full support for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The forum, at the China National Convention Centre, was launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping, who conceptualised the BRI in 2013 to promote not just economic, but also cultural exchange.

The way Malaysia has dealt with the Asian economic superpower, by bringing what was seen

as lopsided agreements back to the negotiating table, has heightened its profile, especially here where 37 world leaders are gathered to seek a consensus on BRI projects.

Malaysia's successful handling of the East Coast Rail Link project, which is the centrepiece of China's infrastructure push, has become a benchmark for other nations, making Dr Mahathir one of the most sought after world leaders here.

He was among the few heads of government, the only one from Asean, invited to present a speech at the opening. The other countries were Russia, Kazakhstan, Egypt and Chile.

"I am sure my country, Malaysia, will benefit from the project," Dr Mahathir told representatives from more than 130 countries gathered here for the event.

All 10 Asean leaders were present at this year's forum.

"Yes, the Belt and Road idea is great. It can bring the landlocked countries of Central Asia closer to the sea.

"They can grow in wealth and their poverty will be reduced. Everyone will benefit from the ease of travel and communication."

He cautioned, however, that while the passages created would enrich littoral states, as much as

"the great nations of the East and West", threats to the states had unfortunately increased with oil spills and dumping of waste at sea.

"But these are designated international waters and the littoral states cannot collect toll to finance the work of cleaning them up.

"If we designate the Straits of Malacca as international waters, then the international community must assume responsibility for keeping the seas clear and unpolluted. But so far, the responsibility falls on littoral states.

"They are the ones to suffer pollution and they have to maintain a sizeable force to clean up the sea and their shores. It does not seem fair that poor littoral states should be burdened with this responsibility."

He underscored the importance of keeping the passages opened up for trade and safe as terrorism and wars would make them incapable of delivering the benefits promised.

"The world claims to be civilised. But civilised people still resort to killing each other to resolve problems. Their capacity to destroy is far greater than their capacity to build.

"It is imperative that the world become less primitive and reject the use of force and massacres to benefit from the opening up of new passages for trade and freight that the BRI promises."