

BELT AND ROAD NOT TO CONTROL NATIONS

China is sincere, understands other country's problems, says Dr M

BEIJING

THE Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is not a China-dominated plan, but one of mutual benefit which takes into account the needs and views of all member countries, said Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Addressing concern that the initiative would be a threat to sovereignty or "debt trap", the prime minister explained that it was a policy created by all nations, not just China.

He admitted that there was concern at first that the plan conceptualised by Chinese President Xi Jinping was to control Asia through its trade routes in the Straits of Malacca and South China Sea.

"There was fear that' there



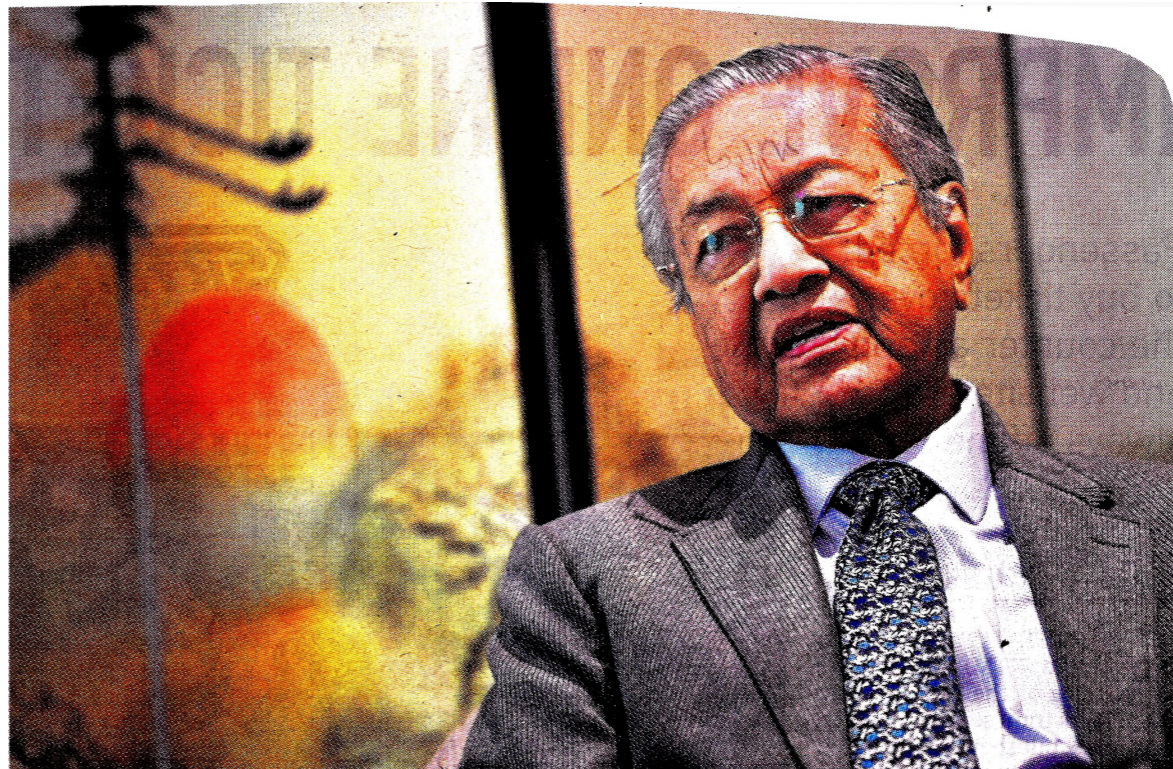
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would be domination, warships, and that our movement will be curtailed.

"But at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF), I saw that it was a plan of cooperation, which will allow member countries, especially developing ones, to work together to build infrastructure and obtain financing.

"And it is not just Southeast Asian countries that are participating, but almost the whole world, including Latin American countries, Africa and Germany. Britain sent its chancellor of the exchequer for the BRF.

"All countries sat together and



Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad at a press conference with the Malaysian media at the end of his five-day working visit to Beijing yesterday, bernama pic

discussed what they required. Nations with a population of 300,000 sat with China, which has a population of 1.4 billion."

All countries discussed as peers, on the same level, he added,

"Understanding what the BRI is all about makes it easier for us to give it our support," Dr Mahathir said in a press conference with the Malaysian media at the end of his five-day working visit here, which he described as a success.

Dr Mahathir arrived here on Wednesday to join 36 world leaders and participants from 130 countries at the BRF at the invitation of Xi.

The prime minister expressed confidence that the BRI was not like other plans in the past proposed by developed countries.

"They wanted to create a world without borders, free trade, TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership). Then they tell us to accept. But not this."

He pointed out that for the BRI, the views of all countries were sought and the joint communique at the end of the forum contained the thoughts of all member nations.

On allegations by some countries in the West that the initiative was a debt trap for developing countries, the prime minister said it happened to countries that borrowed too much.

"They cannot pay and then lose the project."

Dr Mahathir underscored China's sincerity, saying it took into account Malaysia's problems and acceded to the renegotiation of the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project.

"They agreed to lower costs. They are considerate and sensitive to our problems."

Asked whether the cost could be forward further he said it would

depend on the scope of work.

On whether the government would reveal the full details of the ECRL contract, he said it would although much has already been revealed.

"We have to also take into account the sensitivities of the Chinese."

Malaysia and China recently agreed to resume the construction of the ECRL project at a cost of RM44 billion, almost one-third cheaper than the originally proposed figure.

The two-day BRF was the second since the vision for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was shared by Xi in 2013. The first was in 2017. The forum came to a close on Saturday with participating countries reaching a consensus to push for the realisation of what has been called "the project of the century".

Under BRI, or *yi dai yi lu* as it is called here, the Middle Kingdom hopes to recreate the ancient Silk Road that connected Asia to Europe.