

PM set to join major China summit

Dr M will address international leaders at world's biggest diplomatic event

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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be invited to speak at two important forums during the upcoming three-day Belt and Road Summit/Forum in Beijing, the world's largest diplomatic event this year.

Yesterday, China's Ambassador to Malaysia Bai Tian said Dr Mahathir would attend the opening ceremony of the summit by President Xi Jinping on April 26 and deliver a speech at the top leaders' roundtable discussion on the same day.

The 93-year-old leader, who has just revived the China-funded East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project at a reduced construction price, will also be asked to speak at a high-level meeting the following day.

The ECRL is a flagship project under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its resolution before the summit is a relief to China.

Bai Tian said: "This is the world's biggest ever international forum. It provides a platform for stock taking, sharing of views and pushing for more cooperation programmes.

"I believe this summit/forum will provide a good platform for leaders



Fielding the press: Bai Tian (second from right) speaking to the media at the China Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. With him are (from left) the embassy's chief of culture department/first secretary Feng Jun, chief of politics section/first secretary Qiana Jun Jun and first secretary/economic affairs department Li Yabin.

to have face-to-face interaction.

"It provides Malaysia with an important platform to showcase its policy and ideas in international cooperation," he added.

Around 40 heads of governments and 350 ministerial officials, as well as more than 1,000 representatives from the 150 nations will be attending the event.

One of the themes of the summit/forum is anti-corruption and Dr Mahathir may have a lot to share about Malaysia's experience.

Malaysia is a supporter of BRI, which was launched by Xi in 2013:

The BRI aims to create an economic land belt that includes countries on the original Silk Road through Central Asia, West Asia, the

Middle East and Europe, as well as a maritime road that links China's ports with those in South-East Asia, the African coast and the Mediterranean.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to visit Beijing from April 25-28.

On the sidelines of the summit/forum, he will be meeting Xi and Premier Li Keqiang separately.

"This is a good chance for Malaysian and Chinese leaders to exchange views.

"At the top of the agenda will be bilateral relations," said Bai Tian, noting that this would mark Dr Mahathir's second official visit to China after assuming the premiership for the second time.

"The current visit shows how important Malaysia-China relations are to Dr Mahathir. We hope this will be a pleasant, successful and fruitful visit for the Prime Minister.

"At the bilateral meetings, the leaders will exchange views on bilateral issues and map out guidelines for further cooperation," Bai Tian added.

According to the top envoy, Dr Mahathir is respected by China's leaders and people.

"We always remember his support for China. In 2000, he was the

first leader who said the rise of China is not a threat to the world.

"He is also the father of today's Asean Plus, roping in China for regional cooperation," he said.

During his visit, Dr Mahathir is also expected to meet Chinese enterprises keen to invest in Malaysia.

"The revival of the ECRL has boosted the confidence of Chinese investors. The Prime Minister's visit will help invite more Chinese firms to invest here," said Bai Tian.

In reply to a question, he said although China and Malaysia did not see eye to eye on South China Sea issues, this "may account for only 1% of the bilateral relations. We have 99% of cooperation for economic benefits".

He said China was keen to buy more palm oil this year and would remain the largest buyer of Malaysian palm oil and related products.

On whether Malaysian fugitive Jho Low, linked to the 1Malaysia Development Bhd scandal, was still in China, he said police had tried looking for him but to no avail.

"If the Malaysian side provides new information, we will search for him again. In this case, Chinese police still assist the Malaysian police," Bai Tian said.