

# Winning over the young and old

Dr Mahathir wooed investors and gained a host of admirers among the young with his curiosity for new technology during a short trip to Beijing.

HE came, he heard, he saw and now Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has a clearer picture of what the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is all about.

"At first, we were worried that BRI was a plan by China to dominate Asean because one part of the trade route involved the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea.

"But in this forum (the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation), it is more of all participating countries working together to develop our nations respectively," said the Prime Minister.

All countries, regardless of their size and wealth, were given equal standing to discuss policies and plans for their own nations.

So, Dr Mahathir was convinced that the initiative would benefit all participating nations.

The BRI, consisting of the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road, is a China-led investment and infrastructure development project spanning more than 120 countries.

Dr Mahathir, who led a delegation of six ministers and a mentri besar, was in Beijing from April 24 to 28.

It was just eight months ago when

he was on an official trip to the Middle Kingdom, but the sentiments on the ground now, particularly among the business circle, have changed drastically.

At a dialogue session, Chinese entrepreneurs appeared to be more open, raising many questions and seeking more business information.

Their feedback was also positive, with many expressing how their enterprises had successfully expanded in Malaysia and planning to pour in more capital.

During Dr Mahathir's previous trip last August, Chinese investors - although not the same batch of people - were more reserved, worrying that the change of government would affect their businesses and raising concerns on the uncertain relationship between Malaysia and China.

The Prime Minister's special envoy to China, Tan Kok Wai, noticed the difference, too.

"I went through a tough time when I first came to China.

"The Chinese asked me why we cancelled projects with Chinese contractors, whether their investments were secured in Malaysia and many others.

**They are confident, especially after we restarted the East Coast Rail Link and Bandar Malaysia projects. They told me they are glad that all the problems have been resolved**

**Tan Kok Wai**

"And now they are confident, especially after we restarted the East Coast Rail Link and Bandar Malaysia projects.

"They told me they are glad that all the problems have been resolved," added Tan, who was appointed to this position in August last year.

He said China also pledged their support for Malaysia to host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) leaders' summit next year.

He also revealed that between 2013 and 2017, a total of 6,362 Malaysian companies were set up in China.

Tan, who talked about people-to-people ties at a side event of the forum, said he urged China to provide more scholarships for Malaysian students to pursue their studies at Chinese universities.

To mark the 45th anniversary of Malaysia-China relations, he said a series of programmes had been lined up for the celebration.

The events include the Malaysia-China Entrepreneurs Forum, trade-related activities, photo exhibition and others.

Chinese netizens were excited to see Dr Mahathir taking the effort to learn about new technology and considered the world's oldest leader as a role model to motivate themselves to continue learning.

Most of the posts on Weibo were about his visit to the research centre of Huawei in Beijing, where he was greeted by its founder Ren Zhengfei on April 25.

A user wrote: "A 75-year-old (referring to Ren) and a 94-year-old get together to discuss 5G technology. Even the seniors are learning hard, what excuse do we have not

to work harder?"

At the centre of the world's biggest telecommunications equipment maker, Dr Mahathir and Ren also discussed ways to leverage on information and communications technology (ICT) to better facilitate Malaysia's economic development.

Another post about Dr Mahathir's visit to China reads: "He understands that the railway he builds today will benefit Malaysia in the future.

"I believe he will come to China again and work with us to construct more rail roads and infrastructure because he loves his country and hopes to see it becoming strong and prosperous."

International Monetary Fund managing director Christine Lagarde posted a short clip of her chatting with Dr Mahathir on her Weibo.

She wrote in Chinese: "Very happy to have met Prime Minister Mahathir at the Belt and Road Forum 2019.

"I am looking forward to meeting him again in Malaysia in June."

"I consider this trip a success," Dr Mahathir told Malaysian media when concluding his five-day visit to China and less than an hour before he flew home on April 28.