

# 'We support China's Belt and Road, but not its ideologies'

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia is supportive of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and is seeking ways to benefit from it.

However, Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the country's support and participation in the multi-nation initiative did not mean it needed to promote Chinese ideas or ideologies.

Referring to the recent unauthorised distribution of a comic book related to BRI in schools, Dr Mahathir said the government could not allow any country to have undue influence over the younger generation as it tried to move on from past colonial influence.

He said the government could not be seen as promoting any foreign influence to citizens, particularly youths, because it was im-

portant for the latter to understand national policies first.

"I believe China will be a great influence over the world in the future. But for the moment, it is not for us (Malaysia) to promote Chinese ideas and ideologies, but instead, find out how we can benefit from that (BRI).

"I think it will not be good to influence the minds of our young people, who must understand the problems, strategies and policies of our country first. This is so that when they are faced with other people's strategies, they will know their place.

"So as much as we didn't like Western influence in our strategies and schools, we do not want any other country to have undue influence over our young people," said Dr Mahathir.

He was speaking during a question-and-answer session after delivering his keynote address at the Praxis Conference 2019 organised by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia here yesterday.

Deputy Home Minister Datuk Azis Jamman had said on Saturday that the ministry had yet to decide whether to ban the distribution of the comic book titled *Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for Win Winism*.

Speaking in Parliament, he said the current ban was only imposed by the Education Ministry and did not involve the Home Ministry.

The comic book was a collaboration between Asian Comic Cultural Museum curator Hew Kuan Yau, known as "Superman

Hew", and local artist Chong Po Ling, known as Tomato.

Last week, Education Minister Dr Maszlee Malik announced the ban of the comic book in schools.

The comic, which also came in a Bahasa Melayu version, was reportedly sent to libraries in secondary schools.

On Oct 17, Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow denied claims that the state government was behind the distribution of the comic book.

Youth and Sports Minister Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman also lashed out at Hew, who is a former DAP member, for allegedly calling Malays who sympathise with the plight of China's Uighurs "radical".

Hew quit DAP in July 2016 after his Facebook post claiming that

the South China Sea "belongs to Beijing" caused a stir.

He was appointed the Malaysia-China Business Council chairman in February. Since the controversy erupted, he has denied claims that the comic book was spreading propaganda, but insisted it would help students understand the BRI better.

On a separate matter, Dr Mahathir told the Praxis Conference that Asean's appeal for superpowers to adhere to the unobstructed passageway policy for shipping in the Straits of Melaka and the South China Sea was successfully maintained due to the strong regional cooperation.

He said this policy was not only to safeguard trade, but to prevent accidents, which could raise tensions.