

## **Dr Mahathir's visit to China to herald new chapter in bilateral relations**

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PUTRAJAYA, April 23 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and China bilateral relations is set to enter a new chapter, heralding a brighter and vibrant friendship as Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad begins his official visit to Beijing on Thursday.

Apart from attending the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Summit and Forum, Dr Mahathir is also scheduled to have bilateral meetings with China's President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Li Zhanshu during the four-day visit.

Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah said it is a good sign for Kuala Lumpur-Beijing relations going forward after it went through almost a year of what he described as a "disruption".

"For China to accommodate and to arrange for all three, the President, Prime Minister and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, to have bilateral with Tun, it is a very good sign," he said.

Saifuddin said this in a special interview with the Malaysian media at his office in conjunction with the one-year anniversary of Pakatan Harapan's rule this May.

This will be Dr Mahathir's second official visit to China after the first one in August 2018.

Malaysia had recently agreed to revive two megaprojects involving China – the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project and the Bandar Malaysia project.

On April 12, the government announced that the ECRL project will resume at a reduced cost following the signing of a supplementary agreement (SA) between Malaysia Rail Link Sdn

Bhd (MRL) and China Communications Construction Company Ltd (CCCC).

It said the construction cost for Phases 1 and 2 of the ECRL has now been reduced to RM44 billion – a reduction of RM21.5 billion from its original cost of RM65.5 billion.

The ECRL project was stalled after Pakatan Harapan came into power in May 2018 due to its massive cost against the debt-ridden government inherited by Pakatan Harapan.

Meanwhile, on Friday last week, Dr Mahathir announced the government's decision to reinstate the Bandar Malaysia project with an expected gross development value (GDV) of RM140 billion after it was abruptly terminated in May 2017.

The Prime Minister said the decision was made after due deliberation during the Cabinet meeting on April 17 and IWH-CREC Sdn Bhd, the Malaysia-China consortium, the master developer for the project, would resume works on Bandar Malaysia.

“What is important is that during the Prime Minister’s visit last year, he has explained Malaysia’s position and the financial problems faced, as well as reasons for cancellation and negotiations of certain projects.

“China understand why Malaysia took this stand, which is why they agreed to renegotiate, and agreed to increase their palm oil import,” Saifuddin said.

He said the government’s decision to revive both projects was also well received by the people, especially the business community.

“The response I received from the ground is very positive. It reflects positive mood among the business people,” he added.

Saifuddin said foreign investors, especially from China, welcomed this development as a good decision.

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