

# Dr M's China meets 'a good sign'

## PM to have bilateral talks with Beijing's top three leaders at Belt and Road forum

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**PUTRAJAYA:** Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad will hold bilateral meetings with China's three key leaders when he visits the country tomorrow for the Belt and Road Summit and Forum.

This, according to Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah, is a "very, very good sign" about Malaysia's ties with China.

He said the meetings would be with President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, Li Zhanshu.

"Despite their hectic schedule as the host of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) international forum, the three leaders are giving time for our Prime Minister.

"That, in itself, is a very, very good sign," Saifuddin said at a media conference at Wisma Putra yesterday.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to attend the summit opening ceremony on Friday and deliver a speech at the top leaders' round table discussion on the same day.

The Prime Minister, who has just revived the China-funded East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project – a flagship project under the BRI – at a reduced cost, will also be asked to speak at a high-level meeting the next day.

Saifuddin said he recently chaired a meeting with experts and organisations involving Malaysia-China ties including the Malaysia-China Business Council, Malaysia-China Chamber of Commerce, Malaysia-China Friendship Association as well as think tanks and academics.

"They were very positive about

the future of Malaysia-China ties.

"They said the feeling on the ground is very positive.

"Malaysian businessmen are very positive because although they may not be directly involved in a large project with China, that Malaysia has made an important decision on ECRL and Bandar Malaysia reflects a good business sentiment.

"For foreign investors, especially from China, these are decisions that they like," he said.

On another subject, Saifuddin did not rule out the possibility that the government might try to revive a bid to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Asked whether it was "the end of the road" for Malaysia to ratify the ICC as well as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

(Icerd), Saifuddin said: "For Icerd it's the end of the road. For ICC, we will see, because we are calling the bluff of some people who don't seem to be able to defend themselves."

Saifuddin said some people manipulated facts about Icerd and ICC, which led to confusion, and along with attempts at fear mongering, had caused unnecessary worries among the people.

This led the Cabinet to not ratify the two conventions, he said.

On Nov 23 last year, the government announced that it decided not to ratify Icerd but said it would continue to defend the Federal Constitution, which contains a social contract agreed upon by all races during the formation of the country.

On April 5, it was reported Malaysia would withdraw from ratifying the ICC, which covers serious crimes

and crimes against humanity.

The Pakatan Harapan government had, after winning the general election last year, pledged to ratify or sign six remaining human rights conventions the country has not yet ratified or signed.

Moving ahead, Saifuddin said the government would study whether it could move towards ratifying the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment commonly known as the United Nations Convention against Torture or UNCAT.

"These two are less sensitive compared to Icerd or ICC, but we will not rush it. We will study it and discuss it further," he said.