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## Industry leaders push for digital, shared approaches for recovery

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Rethinking current business models and embracing full digitalization for smart manufacturing, logistics, property development and even tourism as the way forward will be vital in a post-COVID recovery world, according to industry leaders and experts at an economic summit.

They were speaking at the 2020 World Chinese Economic Summit held on Dec 21 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, attended by a mix of participants online and offline. Throughout the day's events, panelists discussed China and the world's post-COVID new normal, enhancing connectivity and business cooperation in the Belt and Road Initiative, the digital Silk Road, startups and youth entrepreneurship, smart cities, properties and tourism development, women in business and leadership, as well as maximizing opportunities and collaboration in the Greater Bay Area and ASEAN.

Minister of Transport Wee Ka Siong, in his luncheon presentation, said Malaysia embraces partners from all across the region to reach not only ASEAN and beyond to all over the world.

Malaysia has benefited from the BRI and looks forward to closer collaboration in the new era, said Chairman of Port Klang Authority and Secretary-General of Malaysian Chinese Association Chong Sin Woon during a panel.

A session dubbed "The Digital Silk Road: New Opportunities From Digitalisation, Ai And Blockchain In The New Economy" tackled the possibilities for applying these new technologies to China's Digital Silk Road.

The Digital Silk Road, part of the China-led BRI, focuses on internet connectivity, artificial

intelligence and the digital economy. Speakers urged everyone to develop digital infrastructure and in turn, capitalize on digital assets.

Michael Sung, founding co-director at Fudan Fanhai Fintech Research Center, said the blockchain framework will be the backbone of the future.

"Now I think the important catalyst driver beyond the COVID situation will be China. China is leading the world these days in blockchain," said Sung, who is also founder and chairman of fintech solutions provider CarbonBlue Innovations.

Over 500 blockchain projects have been registered with the Cyber Administration of China, including giant tech companies from Tencent to Huawei.

"The digitalization of value through the use of blockchain can check and trace whether it is real estate, gold, oil commodity and stocks. These assets are also being digitalized in the same way as data. This can bring a huge amount of liquidity in the market, which is very important for SMEs," said Sung.

Kelvin Cho, founder at Blockchain Business Alliance International and president of Yayasan Fintech Sedunia in Malaysia, said that businesses need to rethink their models and their products with the use of data.

"Data has become a power source for everything. We need a way to secure data," said Cho.

He also said we need a way to measure and keep track of who is contributing things. "We are moving from ownership to social sharing."

Chin Chee Seong, national vice-president at the SME Association of Malaysia, said in 2019, 98.5 percent of the businesses in Malaysia were small and medium-sized enterprises. This accounted for 66 percent of the country's employment and the gross domestic product from that alone was 37.1 percent. With the difficulties faced by the SMEs in the pandemic, the contribution will most likely contract to 1.5 percent less than the rest in the previous year.

As borders of many countries remain closed and international travel suspended, Chin, who is also national president of the Malaysia Cross Border Ecommerce Association or MCBEA, encouraged SMEs which basically are engaging in traditional trading practices to change and make full use of the infrastructure of digitization and emphasized digitization moving forward.

And digital businesses encompass every aspect of economic activity, including payments, online shopping, education and healthcare.

Besides what the Malaysian government can do for SMEs, Chin said they are also looking at what the Belt and Road Initiative and the Digital Silk Road can do for them.

Digitization is not something new, Goh Peng Ooi, founder and group executive chairman of global software firm Silverlake Group, said.

"Going forward, time is going to be characterized by paradoxes, disruptions, digital currencies, and cloud," said Ooi. "Business as usual is the worst route to take."

Lee Kim Yew, outgoing executive chairman of Country Heights Holdings Berhad, which is engaged in investment holding and the provision of management services, called on stimulus for young entrepreneurs to make use of technology.

Wei Chuan Beng, senior executive director at KSI Strategic Institute for Asia, Digital Entrepreneurs and Angel Investor at Digital Way Ventures Ltd, said the topic of the digital economy has to start with leadership.

"First, how prepared are we with digital talent? We must start somewhere," said Wei.

He is optimistic that investments in the digital economy like fiberoptics and power cables will pour in. "Digital government is in fact (becoming) eminent. The government must accelerate further adoption," he said.

"The '6P' of digitalization rests on promoting digital culture, piloting some digital adoption in some areas, proliferating end-to-end digital adoptions, protecting the digital infrastructure and data, prospering with the new breakthrough performance, and lastly, partnering with people with competency and create a kind of win-win together," Wei said.