

## **China could offer valuable assistance in boosting Cambodia's labor productivity**

By Hu Weijia Source: People's Daily and Global Times

Chinese President Xi Jinping's upcoming state visit to Cambodia has once again drawn people's attention to the close friendship between the two Asian countries. It seems that Cambodia has become one of China's staunchest supporters within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). One can't help but ask: Will the upcoming trip further consolidate the cooperation between the two governments, allowing Beijing to gain greater influence in the geopolitical landscape of the Asia-Pacific region?

Although bilateral ties between China and Cambodia have already reached a high level, there is still room for improvement. In recent years, China has made a lot of efforts to promote cooperation with Cambodia in trade, infrastructure, tourism and agriculture, but less attention has been paid to helping the Southeast Asian country improve its labor productivity.

With a population of more than 15 million, Cambodia's labor pool is large and flexible enough to offer low-cost labor resources to support the country's industrialization.

However, the process is being hampered because the country lacks an effective education system and also lacks the technical training needed to raise its productivity. A standstill in labor productivity - the amount of output per hour of work - kept the nation's GDP per capita at a low level of \$1,158.7 in 2015 and is causing the country to lag behind some other Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam in the race to build new manufacturing hubs.

Since the early 1990s, the International Labor Organization (ILO) has been an active partner in Cambodia's economic recovery, playing a role in helping generate sustainable employment. In recent years, China has offered help to some of the ILO projects in a bid to provide aid to local Cambodian workers, but now Beijing may need to consider providing more direct assistance to Cambodia amid its efforts to seek closer ties with the Southeast Asian country.

For the Chinese government, it is worth considering setting up a special fund to help Cambodia train more skilled young people to meet the needs of the country's industrialization.

There is no doubt Cambodia will benefit tremendously if China can help the country improve its economy's efficiency and productivity, and we believe such efforts will also contribute to the already strong friendship between the two nations.

Hopefully China can put more focus on helping Cambodia tap the potential of its economy, but this does not mean China should reduce its assistance to the Southeast Asian country in other areas.

According to media reports, a total of 28 documents will be signed during Xi's upcoming visit to promote bilateral cooperation in areas such as trade and investment. It is clear the trip will consolidate the traditional friendship between the two countries.