

## **Xi's Bangladeshi visit to inject new impetus into 'Belt and Road' initiative: diplomat**

People's Daily

As Chinese President Xi Jinping kicks off his state visit to Bangladesh on Thursday, Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Ma Mingqiang commented that the first tour to the country by a Chinese head of state in 30 years will inject new impetus into the construction of the "Belt and Road".

The visit will also lift bilateral cooperation in politics, economy, military and culture, and usher in a new chapter of China-Bangladesh ties, wrote in a signed article published in the People's Daily.

Ma praised the sound momentum of the Bangladeshi economy, especially after the current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took office in 2009.

Despite a sluggish global economy, Bangladesh maintains an annual GDP growth of more than 6.2 percent and increased its economic aggregate to more than \$220 billion, the ambassador wrote, adding that with the second largest foreign exchange reserves in South Asia, Bangladesh has elevated itself to a low-medium income country with a per-capita national income of \$1,466.

In addition, Bangladesh enjoys an average age of 25.6 for its 160-million population. Thanks to low labor costs, it has become the world's second largest garment exporter after China.

Planning to build 100 industrial parks, the country is now envisioning itself to be a middle-income nation by 2021, and a developed one by 2041, Ma said. "Bangladeshis are now marching towards their dream of a Golden Bangladesh."

Connecting South Asia and Southeast Asia, Bangladesh is located at the critical junction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

According to the ambassador, given its favorable geographic location, the two peoples began exchanges as early as the 4th Century BC along the ancient Southern Silk Road. In the following years, eminent Chinese monks Faxian, Xuanzang and Yijing traveled to Bangladesh along the Silk Road to worship the Buddhas, and Chinese navigator Zheng He also left his footprints there.

China and Bangladesh enjoy a traditional friendship, Ma stressed, citing Chinese President Xi Jinping that "China and Bangladesh have nothing but friendship, trust and cooperation."

The "Belt and Road" initiative proposed by Xi, which complies with the development of bilateral ties, can tap the potential for cooperation between the two countries, he added, saying that the initiative has also been praised by the Cambodian Prime Minister.

Hailing China as a well-tested friend of Bangladesh, Hasina pledged her country's support to the

initiative, believing that the initiative, together with the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, will offer vast opportunities for regional connectivity and cooperation.

She added that as the Bangladeshi public aspires to learn from China's experience, there is a solid foundation for both nations to cement a friendship.

Commenting on the complementing Chinese and Bangladeshi economies, Ma said that the lagging infrastructure and rich labor resources in Bangladesh make it an ideal partner for Chinese enterprises to cooperate.

In 2015, bilateral trade volume increased by 17.2 percent year-on-year, and the value of contracts signed by Chinese enterprises in Bangladesh surged by 30 percent. Bilateral trade also maintained strong momentum in the first half of this year.

Sharing compatible national visions and plans, the two countries are discussing further cooperation in infrastructure, power and telecommunication, Ma noted, adding that under the framework of the "Belt and Road" initiative, China and Bangladesh will ramp up strategic alignment and accelerate pragmatic cooperation.