

China deepens ties with Latin America out of strategic consideration: expert

By Song Haoxin from People's Daily

President Xi Jinping's forthcoming Latin American trip, which is his third time to the continent after taking office in 2013, will send a clear signal to Latin America that it is China's long-term strategic decision rather than a temporary expediency to enhance ties with this region.

During his stay in Ecuador, the first leg of his trip, Xi will ink a series of important cooperation documents and attend inauguration ceremony of China-aided projects together with his Ecuadoran counterpart Rafael Correa.

Xi will also elaborate China's policies towards Latin America when giving a speech at the Peruvian Congress, while holding talks, attending signing ceremonies of cooperation agreements and press conferences with his Chilean counterpart Michelle Bachelet during his trip to Chile.

Liu Yuqin, former Chinese ambassador to Ecuador and Chile, told the People's Daily that Xi's third visit to the continent comes as China and Latin America bolstered their ties in recent years. As representative regional countries, the three destinations share traditional friendship and solid cooperation with China.

It will be the first time for Ecuador to receive a state visit by a Chinese president. In October 1971, before Ecuador established diplomatic relationship with China, the country voted for restoring the lawful seat of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations.

Both nations maintained a smooth relationship since establishing diplomatic ties 36 years ago, and decided to upgrade their bilateral relationship to a strategic partnership in 2015. China now is the third biggest trade partner and a key investor to Ecuador.

In recent years, China and Ecuador have reaped fruits in mutually beneficial cooperation on energy, electricity and mineral resources. China-aided major projects, such as hydropower stations, emergency response center for national security, hospitals, have played an important role in the latter's economic development and disaster relief.

After a deadly earthquake jolted the Pacific coast of Ecuador in April, the Chinese government and Chinese enterprises lent a helpful hand in disaster relief immediately. Such efforts were praised by local society.

Peru and Chile were among the first Latin American countries who signed free trade agreements with China. Propelled by the agreements, the two countries now witness a double-digit growth in their exports to China, while China now has grown into their biggest trade partner.

Chile has been a pioneer in developing ties with China, and created a host of "firsts" in bilateral exchanges. The country was not only the first South American nation to establish diplomatic ties

with China, but also the first country that recognized China's market economy status, and the first to sign a FTA agreement with China in Latin America.

The first inter-governmental friendship organization towards China in Latin America was rightly established in Chile in 1952.

What's more, China now is Chile's biggest trade partner, with Chinese automobile brands like Great Wall Motors, Chery Automobile and Changan Automobile, are favored by local consumers. China Construction Bank has set up a branch in Chile, which is not only the first China-funded bank in Chile, but also the first RMB clearing bank in South America.

As both China and Latin America are restructuring their development strategies amid the current world economic recession, a closer cooperation will not only address their aspiration and demands, but help revitalize the economies of both nations, the region and the world at large.

With complementary advantages in economy, both sides can tap their economic potential and achieve a win-win outcome by furthering their cooperation.

Moreover, Chinese investment is now carrying more weight in Latin American economy. Besides, both sides also share willingness to beef up political dialogues and cooperation, coordinate positions and strategies in international affairs, in order to deepen collaboration in the international arena.

A healthy Sion-Latin-America collaboration will also leverage South-South cooperation, analysts pointed out, explaining that as a key player on world's stage and propeller of South-South cooperation, China is a brother to developing countries, and their trustworthy friend as well.

According to Liu, Xi's three visits to the continent in four years have sent a clear message to Latin American countries: instead of a makeshift plan, it is a long-term decision out of strategic consideration for China to strengthen ties with Latin America.

She told the People's Daily that the trip also tells the world that China hopes to better understand Latin America, and reinforce bilateral political mutual trust and cooperation on the basis of equality, mutual benefits and mutual respect, thus bringing tangible benefits to both peoples.

This trip will consolidate the traditional friendship between China and the three countries, improve bilateral political trust and pragmatic cooperation in a comprehensive way, and push China-Latin America comprehensive cooperative partnership for sustained progress, so that developing countries and emerging economies including Latin America could together build a community of human destiny by addressing challenges together and pursuing shared development.