

Xi Jinping's visit to Bangladesh is epoch-making: Bangladeshi Prime Minister

By Xu Wei from People's Daily

The upcoming state visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Bangladesh assumes special significance, as it is taking place 30 years since the last visit by a Chinese President. Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told the People's Daily in an exclusive interview ahead of Xi's trip.

"The visit will be an epoch-making one, placing our bilateral relations on a higher trajectory," she said, adding that her country has high expectations for Xi's visit.

According to Hasina, the relationship between Bangladesh and China dates back two millennia. The two visits to China by the father of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the 1950s laid the foundation for a bridge between the two countries in the modern era.

As the firstborn daughter of Rhaman, Hasina previously set foot on Chinese territory at her father's side. She also presented flowers to then Chinese premier Zhou Enlai when she was just nine years old.

The Prime Minister told People's Daily that her father used to reminisce frequently about his memorable experiences of the great land of China and its wonderful people. As a child, Hasina grew up admiring China and its determined and hardworking people.

After she assumed office as Bangladeshi Prime Minister in 1996, she chose China as the destination for her inaugural state visit. "My visit to China in 2010 elevated the relationship to a 'Closer Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation' that was further widened and deepened during my second visit in 2014," the Prime Minister said.

Hasina pointed out that China has emerged not only as the second largest economy in the world, but also as the powerhouse of the global production, finance and marketing chains. As Bangladesh is in the process of implementing programs and projects to become a middle income country by 2021, it needs support and cooperation from its trusted friends like China.

"We are now placing increasingly more emphasis on transforming our manufacturing and other economic activities to a technology-driven sustainable one. For that, we need sustainable agriculture and infrastructure, ecologically sustainable industrialization, and need to develop integrated markets, which can serve both the domestic and international arena. Obviously, we will need impetus in capital, technology, entrepreneurship and management. We are building key avenues in the manufacturing sector, such as RMG, jute, textiles, leather, shipbuilding, and ICT as part of global supply chains where they need to conform to resource-efficient technologies, evolutionary processes and learning intelligent trends. We need more investment in power and energy sectors. Our infrastructure needs urgent upgrading," she added, expecting that Xi's visit to Bangladesh will add new momentum to Chinese investment in these key areas.

Hailing China as one of the most important development partners of Bangladesh, Hasina suggested that key areas of cooperation between the two countries include, among others, economic, trade and investment cooperation in the fields of infrastructure, industrial capacity development, energy and power, transportation,

information and communication technology, agriculture, and defense.

“China has been our largest trading partner for some time,” she said, explaining that two-way bilateral trade has crossed the \$10 billion mark.

According to Hasina, Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridges, Bangabandhu International Convention Center and other Chinese assisted projects are testimony to the friendship between the two sides. Bangladesh is also going to launch its exclusive “Chinese Economic and Industrial Zone” (CEIZ) in Chittagong. “We believe that it will be a landmark event in our economic, investment and trade cooperation,” she said.

“At this moment we are working together on close to 50 projects worth billions of dollars under the full spectrum of the public, private and PPP models between our two countries. We believe that these projects will generate major economic multipliers for the peoples of not only these two countries but also all peoples of the region,” she stressed.

Hasina also praised the liberal investment policy of Bangladesh, saying the country also boasts an abundant, young and easily trainable workforce with competitive wages, low barriers to entry and duty-free quota-free access to the EU, Australian, Canadian, Indian, Japanese and New Zealand markets.

“We need to further relax the visa regime and establish direct air connectivity between Chinese and Bangladeshi urban and industrial growth centers, particularly between Beijing and other major cities of China with Dhaka and other major cities of Bangladesh,” said the Prime Minister.

“In particular, we would request that your entrepreneurs develop tourism facilities in Sylhet, Cox’s Bazar, the Sundarbans, the major river systems and other natural and historical places of significance,” she added.

“We recognize and underline the significance of advancing people-to-people contacts to deepen mutual understanding and friendship. We need to strengthen people-to-people exchanges to deepen civilizational ties and also to actively expand exchanges and cooperation in the areas of culture, science, technology and media.” She further underlined that Bangladesh would like to increasingly promote interactions between media organizations, think tanks, academia, research communities, scholars, friendship associations, women’s organizations, art troupes, athletes, sports organizers, as well as the youth of the two countries.

Hasina said that they look at the "Belt and Road" initiative, the brainchild of President Xi Jinping, with great appreciation, believing that the joint construction of the initiative and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar economic corridor will help Bangladesh and other regional countries achieve mutual benefits and prosperity.

“I am confident that the visit of President Xi to Bangladesh will usher in a new chapter in our bilateral ties by elevating it from a ‘Closer Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation’ to a ‘Strategic Partnership of Cooperation,’ allowing us to engage in win-win cooperation in all areas for the benefit of our peoples,” she concluded.