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XI'S VISION | MAJOR COUNTRY DIPLOMACY

Xi's proposal facilitating exchanges

China's diplomatic efforts nurture cultural understanding and peace

By ZHANG YUNBI zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

When asked about President Xi Jinping's ambitious proposal made last year to invite a total of 50,000 young people from the United States over a period of five years to visit China on exchange and study programs, Eric Foster, nephew of legendary journalist Edgar Snow's wife, Helen Foster Snow, said he strongly supports more exchanges of this kind.

Foster, a US policy observer focused on China affairs, said that around 10 years ago, when he first came to China, the average American heard many bad things about the country because "the media in the West hardly gave any good news about China".

"So when I came here, I was just totally blown away how modern it was," he told China Daily. "If more Americans, more students can come here and see China themselves and (take part in) exchange programs, then they're gonna go back and say, 'Wow, it's so cool'."

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the concept of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, and Foster is one of many policy observers who have been impressed by how the country has worked hard in advancing cultural exchanges and boosting mutual learning among cultures.

As a supporter of the Belt and Road Initiative, Foster believes exchanges make peace.

"China is setting an example for the whole world, because how can there be peace when two countries can't get along, trade, and talk to each other?"

In recent years, China has scaled up and diversified its efforts in facilitating people-to-people exchanges with developed as well as developing countries, and promoting the sharing of knowledge, technology and governing experiences, officials and observers said.

When addressing the BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, in October, President Xi said, "Last year, I proposed an initiative for BRICS digital education cooperation, and I am delighted to see that it has become a reality."

At the summit, he announced that China will implement a capacity-building program for BRICS digital education.

"We will open 10 learning centers in BRICS countries in the next five years, and provide training opportunities for 1,000 local education administrators, teachers and students," he added.

Scholars from countries such as the United Kingdom and Pakistan noted that the Global Civilization Initiative, proposed by President Xi last year, marks a major philosophy focused on enshrining mutual respect among different cultures, values and political systems.

Asad Ullah Khan, a research fellow at the China-Pakistan Study Centre of the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, said the Global Civilization Initiative "is an important idea aimed at shaping the future for a better world".

"Some scholars in the West, particularly in the US, are critical of this initiative, since the concept uses principles of equality, peace, prosperity, dialogue and inclusiveness among different civilizations, in contrast to the Western notion of 'clash of civilizations'," he wrote in an article this year.

Khan, noting that "in Chinese tradition, people and cultures play a significant role", said that Beijing's advocacy of people-to-people exchanges aims to drive countries to explore global civilization dialogue and cooperation, expand cooperation avenues and promote "mutual understanding among nations for the progress and prosperity of human civilization".

Upholding the mutual understanding of civilizations, further practicing the principles of the Global Civilization Initiative, and strengthening the exchange of experience in governance also were part of the outcome and consensus at the fifth China-Central Asia Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Chengdu, Sichuan province, this month.

In the next three years, China will offer 1,500 training opportunities for people from the five Central Asian countries and increase the scholarship quota to 600, in order to cultivate more talent of various types urgently needed for the development of the countries, Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters.

Stephen Bainous Kargbo, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization's representative to China, said, "From my perspective and from the industry's perspective, China will continue to be a beacon of hope and also an example of what industrialization can do in any nation."

"China has demonstrated that through clean, clear and consistent industrial policy, transformation can take place," Kargbo told China Daily.

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People with their belongings crowd the Lebanese side of the Masnaa border crossing in the Bekaa Valley on Sunday, waiting to cross back into Syria. A rebel offensive in Syria moved rapidly across government-held territory and entered Damascus in 10 days. HUSSEIN MALLA / AP

Nations call for stability in Mideast amid Syria crisis

China said it is closely following the situation in Syria and hopes that stability will return to the country as soon as possible, after Syrian opposition forces pulled off a lightning 10-day offensive, capturing vast areas of government-held territory, and stormed into the capital, Damascus, early Sunday.

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Several other countries joined the chorus for ending conflicts and restoring stability in the Middle East region, after Syrian state television aired a video statement of a man in military fatigues, flanked by armed fighters, who said that President Bashar al-Assad had been overthrown.

The statement came hours after a Syrian opposition war monitor said that Assad had left the country for an undisclosed location. Multiple media outlets also reported his departure from Syria.

Xinhua News Agency journalists in Damascus reported hearing intense gunfire reverberating through the streets, and said they witnessed heavy traffic with vehicles trying to leave the capital.

Three powerful explosions rocked Damascus on Sunday evening, with local media reports claiming these were Israeli airstrikes targeting abandoned military bases.

Abu Mohammed al-Golani, leader of the Islamist rebel alliance Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which engineered the offensive, said that Syrian Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al-Jalali will oversee public institutions until an official transfer of authority is completed.

Jalali expressed his readiness to cooperate with any leadership chosen by the Syrian people. "We extend our hands to every Syrian citizen committed to safeguarding the country's resources," he said in a televised address. "Syria belongs to all Syrians, and I urge everyone to think rationally about the nation's best interests."

China is actively helping Chinese nationals who wish to leave Syria to do so in a safe and orderly way, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said in a statement on Sunday. The Chinese government is also staying in contact with those still in Syria and offering them advice on how to stay safe, the spokesperson said.

"The Chinese embassy is still up and running and carrying out its duty in Syria. We will continue to give every possible assistance to Chinese nationals in need," the spokesperson added.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Sunday that Assad resigned as Syria's president and departed from the country after calling for a peaceful transfer of power. It added that Russia did not participate in any talks related to the transfer of power.

United States President Joe Biden and his team "are closely monitoring the extraordinary events in Syria and staying in constant touch with regional partners", the White House said in a statement.

Israel said it has deployed forces in the United Nations-monitored buffer zone with Syria and in other areas deemed necessary for defense. "We will not allow any hostile force to establish itself on our border," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quoted as saying by Reuters.

Iran called for "the swift end of military conflicts, the prevention of terrorist actions, and the com-

mencement of national dialogue" with all sectors of Syrian society.

Turkiye called on all actors to act with prudence and to be watchful. A new Syrian administration must be established inclusively, and there should be no desire for revenge, the country's foreign minister said.

Qatar renewed its calls for ending the crisis in Syria, Jordan urged avoiding any conflict that could further destabilize the region, Saudi Arabia said it is determined to do "what is possible to avoid a chaotic outcome" for Syria, and Egypt affirmed its support for the Syrian people and the country's sovereignty and unity.

Yu Guoqing, a researcher at the Institute of West-Asian and African Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, told China Daily that given Syria's important geographical location, any changes in its domestic political situation are bound to have an impact on the Middle East, as well as on other strife-torn regions.

Yang Yilin and Zhao Jia in Beijing contributed to this story.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Public debut



Tourists take photos of a giant panda at Ocean Park in Hong Kong on Sunday. Pandas An An and Ke Ke, who were gifted by the central government to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, made their public debut on Sunday.

ANDY CHONG / CHINA DAILY See story, page 5

Chinese solution on land degradation wins applause

By YAN DONGJIE in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

Building on mature big data and artificial intelligence technologies, Chinese scientists have developed a targeted system for land degradation management on the Arabian Peninsula, which can be used to support governance decisions in the region, an expert said.

At the ongoing 16th session of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Li Xiaosong and his team from the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Aerospace Information Research Institute showcased the system, garnering interest from representatives of several countries.

"We are using big data to support the achievement of sustainable development goals," he said, adding that they are generating models and algorithms to facilitate governance decisions of policymakers.

To build these models and algorithms, the scientists first generated a large database, including remote-sensing data, ground observation data and reports from various regions, and then combined it with over 40 years of China's desertification control experience and various new technologies, Li said.

Since COP16 opened in the Saudi capital on Dec 2, Li has showcased the system both at the China Pavilion and during multinational discussions.

Through a mobile application called LDN Tracker, users can select any location and the platform will provide information about the area's land status, including historical evolution, production capacity and climate conditions.

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Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

FRESH APPROACHES TO WINTER PASTURING SEE STRONG RETURNS

Use of high-tech methods reduce environmental impact, boost incomes

By CHEN MEILING in Beijing, MA JINGNA in Lanzhou and MAO WEIHUA in Urumqi

Caring for livestock during the cold season in Northwest China has been modernized in recent years, with Beidou positioning, mobile support vehicles and real-time weather updates making the trek to

winter pastures easier for herds-men and animals.

The sight of hundreds of thousands of yaks, cattle, sheep and camels migrating through high country has become one of the most colorful images marking the coming of winter.

However, in Sunan Yugur autonomous county in Zhangye, Gansu province, a rare sight could



be seen this year. About 200,000 livestock were still grazing in the area on farmland rented by the herders as the winter closed in. The yaks and sheep were eating

stalks left from the last corn harvest.

The move to keep them in the vicinity is being adopted across the county with the aim of boosting farm incomes while reducing environmental stress.

Gao Yongdong, 53, raises 200 yaks and about 20 sheep at Kangle town near the Qilian Mountains.

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