

## INSIDE

- Lifeline for young Afghan heart patients > p10
- Project honors Chinese-American veterans > p11



The 14th China-ASEAN Expo and accompanying business and investment summit celebrate China and ASEAN's roles in driving global growth. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY ASIA WEEKLY

# A driving force for growth

Expo in Nanning celebrates the close cooperation between China and ASEAN with tourism playing an important role

By **YANG HAN** in Nanning  
kelly@chinadailyapac.com

China has always seen the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a priority in China's diplomatic agenda and a key focal point of its Belt and Road Initiative.

The statement was made by Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli on Sept 12 at the opening ceremony of the 14th China-ASEAN Expo (CAEXPO) and China-ASEAN Business and Investment Summit.

The event took place in Nanning, the capital of South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, over four days.

In attendance were leaders from the 10 ASEAN countries, as well as high-level officials from Kazakhstan. This was the first time the annual expo hosted leaders representing nations outside of China and ASEAN.

Zhang noted that China and ASEAN are deeply connected geographically and culturally, which is a natural advantage in building the Belt and Road.

Proposed by President Xi Jinping in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative aims to build a Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to connect Asia with Europe and Africa along ancient trade routes.

More than 100 countries and international organizations have joined and support this initiative, and about 70 of them have signed cooperation agreements with China.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of ASEAN and welcomes the China-ASEAN Year of Tourism Cooperation. It is also a crucial year for Belt and Road development.

With the theme Jointly Build the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, Promote Regional Economic Integration through Tourism, the expo and summit have drawn the keen attention of China, ASEAN and other countries.

"Over half a century of development, ASEAN has made this organization a very strong and representative force for safeguarding regional peace and stability and promoting the multipolar development of the world," said Zhang.

The vice-premier added that cooperation between China and ASEAN has yielded fruitful results in areas of policy communication, infrastructure connectivity, trading, financing and people-to-people exchange.

The China-Myanmar oil pipeline and other projects are now in operation, and the construction of China-backed rail projects are well under way. These include the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed line, China-Laos railway and Malaysia's East Coast link. The China-Thailand railway is also set to start construction.

China and ASEAN form the world's largest free trade area of developing countries. From 1991 to 2016, bilateral trade volume grew nearly 56-fold, while two-way cumulative investment volume rose nearly 355-fold, Zhang said.

In the first seven months of this year, China-ASEAN trade volume increased 14.5 percent year-on-year, higher than China's overall trade growth rate.

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank — with China and ASEAN countries as founding members — has provided \$2.83 billion worth of loans to 17 projects from nine Asian developing countries in 2016.

In 2016, more than 38 million people traveled between both sides. Every week, China and ASEAN countries are connected by more than 2,700 flights. More than 1 million tourists from Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines respectively visited China last year, while China has been the largest source of tourists for ASEAN countries.

Brunei is the expo's "country of honor" this year. During the opening ceremony, Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah said that ASEAN and China have worked closely to promote peace and stability in Southeast Asia, as well as to promote further economic growth and integration.

ASEAN is the sixth-largest economy in the world with a population of more than 622 million people. It is anticipated to be the fourth-largest economy by 2030, Hassanal said.

He added that China's consistent support in ASEAN's community building is much appreciated.

Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen noted that the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road has become an important agenda for ASEAN coun-

tries, and will be a contributing force to strengthen the development of the tourism industry.

As a pillar of Cambodia's economic growth, tourism has created a large number of jobs and helped its people out of poverty.

With unique tourism attractions in natural settings, Cambodia attracted about 830,000 Chinese tourists in 2016, an increase of more than 20 percent over the previous year, according to the prime minister.

"The past years have seen slow recovery of the world economy as well as multiple challenges, including trade barriers and economic protectionism," said Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Truong Hoa Binh.

"However, China and ASEAN countries have managed to maintain high-speed growth."

He attributed the growth to the close cooperation between the two sides in different sectors.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, China has become ASEAN's largest trading partner, while ASEAN is China's third-largest trading partner, fourth-largest export market and second-largest source of imports.

China has been Vietnam's largest economic trade and tourism partner, while Vietnam has also become the largest economic trade and tourism partner of China among ASEAN members, said Binh.

China established dialogue relations with ASEAN in 1991, progressing to full dialogue partner in 1996.

In 1997, the two sides commenced a partnership of good neighborliness and mutual trust, which then developed into the Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in 2003.

Lao Deputy Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone said ASEAN has continuously strengthened its external relations, particularly with China as a dialogue partner, in areas like economic cooperation.

He said that the China-Laos railway has already completed 10 percent of its construction work and is expected to open in 2022.

Speaking as a representative for CAEXPO's special guest country, Kazakh First Deputy Prime Minister Askar Myrzakmetov said the country will be an important transit port to connect China and ASEAN. It plans to establish a logistics park in Nanning to further enhance its logistics cooperation with China and ASEAN countries.

The opening ceremony also witnessed the launch of the Southern Transport Corridor to boost China-Singapore connectivity, a joint project between the two countries to strengthen regional links in areas including maritime, land, air and Internet.

Next year will mark the 15th anniversary of the ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity. Vice-Premier Zhang suggested that China and ASEAN should work hand in hand to open the new chapter of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.