

SPOTLIGHT

Belt and Road shows its heart

Afghan children in need of treatment receive free surgery under China-led initiative's humanitarian aid plan



A parent whose child suffers from congenital heart disease writes the Chinese characters for "China" and the child's name to express gratitude to the Chinese Red Cross foreign aid medical team in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug 26. PHOTOS BY PHOTOS BY WANG JING / CHINA DAILY



The young patients and their parents pose for photos with medical staff before catching the plane home to Afghanistan on Sept 13.



An Afghan child with congenital heart disease during the flight to Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region on Aug 30.



Cai Qizhe (middle) from the Chinese Red Cross foreign aid medical team conducts screenings of children for congenital heart disease in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug 26.



Medical staff soothe a child to prepare for surgery at the First Affiliated Hospital of Xinjiang Medical University on Sept 2, as part of the Belt and Road Initiative's humanitarian aid program.



Afghan women hold their children while waiting for screening in Kabul on Aug 26.

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A group of 12 Afghan children set off on their return journey from Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region on Sept 13, having received free treatment for congenital heart disease.

Aged under 8, they are the first group of children from Afghanistan to benefit from a pioneering humanitarian aid plan in China under the Belt and Road Initiative, which seeks to improve connectivity along the ancient Silk Road routes.

Earlier, a team of medical experts from Beijing and Xinjiang and from the Red Cross Society of China flew to the Afghan capital, Kabul, and conducted screenings.

They selected children whose conditions were suitable for surgery and brought them to the First Affiliated Hospital of Xinjiang Medical University in Urumqi, capital of the Xinjiang Uygur

autonomous region, for treatment.

The project, launched by the Chinese Red Cross Foundation Belt and Road Fraternity Fund, aims to support Belt and Road countries and regions to address pressing social needs, carry out medical aid programs and provide people in need with humanitarian assistance.

Guided by the Silk Road spirit, the Belt and Road participating countries have pooled their efforts to build the education Silk Road and the health Silk Road, and carried out cooperation in science, education, culture, health and people-to-people exchange, President Xi Jinping said in his keynote speech at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing in May.

Years of political instability and lack of basic medical facilities threaten the health and safety of people, especially children, in Afghanistan.

The Afghan project, jointly operated with the Afghan Red Crescent Society,

aims to raise funds and medical resources to send a team of top-notch Chinese pediatric cardiologists to Afghanistan, said Sun Shuopeng, secretary-general of the Chinese Red Cross Foundation, the fundraising arm of the society, who led the foreign aid team.

Six-year-old Shafiq Bilal was among the 12 patients who received surgery. Before taking off for the return journey to Afghanistan, his father Asim Shafiq expressed his gratitude to the Chinese medical team.

"They came to us from thousands of miles away and helped us cure the diseases that troubled our children. We met a lot of good people in China," he said.

Offering treatment to Afghan children with congenital heart disease marked the first project under the Belt and Road Initiative's humanitarian aid programs.

The Red Cross Society of China said the target during the first run of this project is to help treat 100 Afghan children.



A child with congenital heart disease undergoes a preoperative evaluation on Sept 2 at the First Affiliated Hospital of Xinjiang Medical University.



Children who received surgical treatment, along with their parents holding pictures of their doctors, participate in a video call with consulting doctors in Beijing on Sept 13 at the First Affiliated Hospital of Xinjiang Medical University in Urumqi, capital of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.