

## EDITORIAL

# Flying the flag for calm waters

China and ASEAN members must not let outside countries hinder their efforts toward deeper cooperation

State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to the Philippines last week has underlined the great importance China attaches to its neighborhood diplomacy. It is another sign of China's commitment to deepening ties with countries in Southeast Asia and working with them to build a shared future.

Wang's talks with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and his Philippine Foreign Minister Teodoro Locsin Jr touched upon a wide range of issues, from deepening

ing bilateral cooperation to jointly defending multilateralism and maintaining peace in the South China Sea.

Indeed, in a little more than two years, Beijing and Manila have made great strides in cooperation. Each time high-ranking officials from the two countries have met, they have focused on how to expand their fields of cooperation and deepen mutual trust. Wang's visit this time is no exception, as it has aimed to consolidate the basis for further improvement in bilateral relations, so as to bring more

benefits to both countries.

In Manila, Wang made a high evaluation of the two countries' efforts to properly handle their differences and the useful experience both sides have accumulated in setting aside their territorial dispute so that bilateral ties can flourish.

By looking to the larger picture of nation-to-nation ties and regional peace and stability, the two sides have set a good example for other countries in the region.

Their rapprochement has not only contributed to ratcheting

down tensions in the South China Sea, it has also helped build the current desirable momentum in the negotiations between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on a code of conduct in the South China Sea.

But while these negotiations are in progress, the countries concerned will have to be aware of attempts from outside the region to hinder their efforts.

Some countries, of which the United States is the ringleader, may not want to see China and the members of ASEAN working

together for the good of the region, and they continue to try and make waves in the region.

Their disruptive behavior was once again on display as the US navy provoked a close encounter with a Chinese destroyer at the doorstep of Chinese islets. This is part of their blame game in which China has been given the role of the baddie.

China and ASEAN countries should remain alert to this ill trend to ensure it does not delay or derail the finalizing of a code of conduct for the South China Sea.

## Beijing promotes peace, prosperity

CPEC aims to speed up regional integration, facilitate strategic ties and socioeconomic development

China has played a crucial role in maintaining regional peace and security by upholding its concept of an inclusive, cooperative and sustainable security. This has clarified the country's stance on issues of regional concern, contributing to long-term stability and development in Asia, which includes the promotion



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of common development, building of partnerships, improvement of existing multilateral frameworks, rule-setting, military exchanges and proper settlement of differences.

To ensure the long-term stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region, China has put forward a number of proposals that have been highly valued by the international community. To ensure common development is the fundamental guarantee of peace and stability, and the "master key" to solving security problems.

The China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative is not only a path of development but also a path of peace, as it will not only bring opportunities to the economic

development of regional countries but also provide ideas and solutions for them to solve security problems.

The central theme behind the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is to open new economic and trade avenues that would lead to the overall social and economic prosperity of the region. The fruit of this economic cooperation is a market far larger in scope than the one that exists, because of economic conflict in the region.

Two of the most reputable theories that support the idea of regional stability, regional integration and strategic cooperation can be stated in terms of "economic opportunity cost hypotheses" and "neo-functionalism".

The first theory assumes that trade and economic interdependence increases stakes among economically integrated nations and thereby reduces chances of conflicts erupting, whereas the proponents of neo-functionalism are of the view that cooperation in one area produces cooperation in other areas.

CPEC will pass through Gilgit-Baltistan in the north, which will connect Kashgar in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. Almost 80 percent of China's oil is currently transported through the Strait of Malacca to Shanghai. The distance by ship from the Persian Gulf to the port of Shanghai is

some 16,000 km, but with Gwadar becoming operational, the shipping journey will be reduced to less than 5,000 km. When fully operational, Gwadar will promote not only the economic development of Pakistan but also serve as a gateway to the Central Asian countries.

Keeping in view regional stability, Pakistan and India are both important neighbors for China, which wants to promote trade with its neighbors. Pakistan is a victim of terrorism and all countries are responsible for contributing toward the eradication of terrorism.

Hence, regional integration is not possible as long as regional trade is sacrificed for so-called security. Pakistan needs to follow the Chinese model whose trade with India has crossed over \$100 billion despite political issues between the two nations. Some elements also fear that if there is peace in the region, it will challenge their predominance in the business of the state.

Further, the dimension of the CPEC that is ignored is its potential to defeat terrorism in the region by improving the socioeconomic conditions of the people. The Sri Lankan polity, at first divided over the role of China in the region, has come to recognize that the Belt and Road Initiative fits well with Colombo's goals of rebuilding a war-torn economy through enhanced connectivity.

China also calls for improving the regional security architecture to lay a solid foundation for enduring peace and stability in the region, and also calls on countries to properly handle differences and disputes to maintain peace and stability in the region.

In the context of Pakistan, CPEC is often termed as a game changer for the weak economy of Pakistan. The corridor project carries vital significance as it promises to elevate Islamabad's economic growth.

Unlike aid from the United States, China's aid to Pakistan has offered infrastructure and energy projects that would serve as a means to improve Pakistan's economy. Despite the cheap cost of land, Pakistan lags behind in connectivity, which increases the cost of trade. However, under the umbrella of the CPEC, the cost would be minimized and export incentives increased.

Pakistan expects 4 percent of global trade to use the CPEC. The value of toll tax and rental fees that Pakistan can expect to gain from the CPEC would be roughly \$6 billion to \$8 billion by 2020.

The strategic and economic balance of power in the region would ensure the peaceful resolution of conflicts but also enhance strategic stability, leading to a win-win situation. The CPEC, with its focus on Gwadar, has also given impetus

to maritime cooperation between China and Pakistan. Both countries wish to enhance bilateral cooperation in the fields of maritime security, search and rescue, and the blue water economy.

Hence, it would not be wrong to say that the CPEC has the potential to facilitate strategic cooperation. This approach serves as a strategic enabler in a rapidly transforming world order. It is therefore the need of the time to move from the archaic geopolitical vendetta of the 19th and 20th centuries toward interstate strategic relations in the 21st century.

The pursuit of a state's national interest in the international arena constitutes its foreign policy, but such a pursuit shapes the possibilities of states to behave collectively. Through a balanced foreign policy approach, the South Asian region can achieve its mega development projects and establish itself as a peaceful and integrated region. Confidence-building measures between regional players are the primary factors that can uplift the socioeconomic standards of the people of this region.

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