

# Pacts reinforce bilateral relations

Xi says talks with Duterte 'in-depth and fruitful', notes common interests in South China Sea

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China and the Philippines signed 29 cooperation documents covering such areas as trade, investment, finance, agriculture, culture and the Belt and Road Initiative during President Xi Jinping's state visit to the Southeast Asian country on Nov 20.

The signing ceremony was witnessed by Xi and his Philippine counterpart Rodrigo Duterte in Manila. Duterte hosted a grand ceremony to welcome Xi before their talks and the signing ceremony.

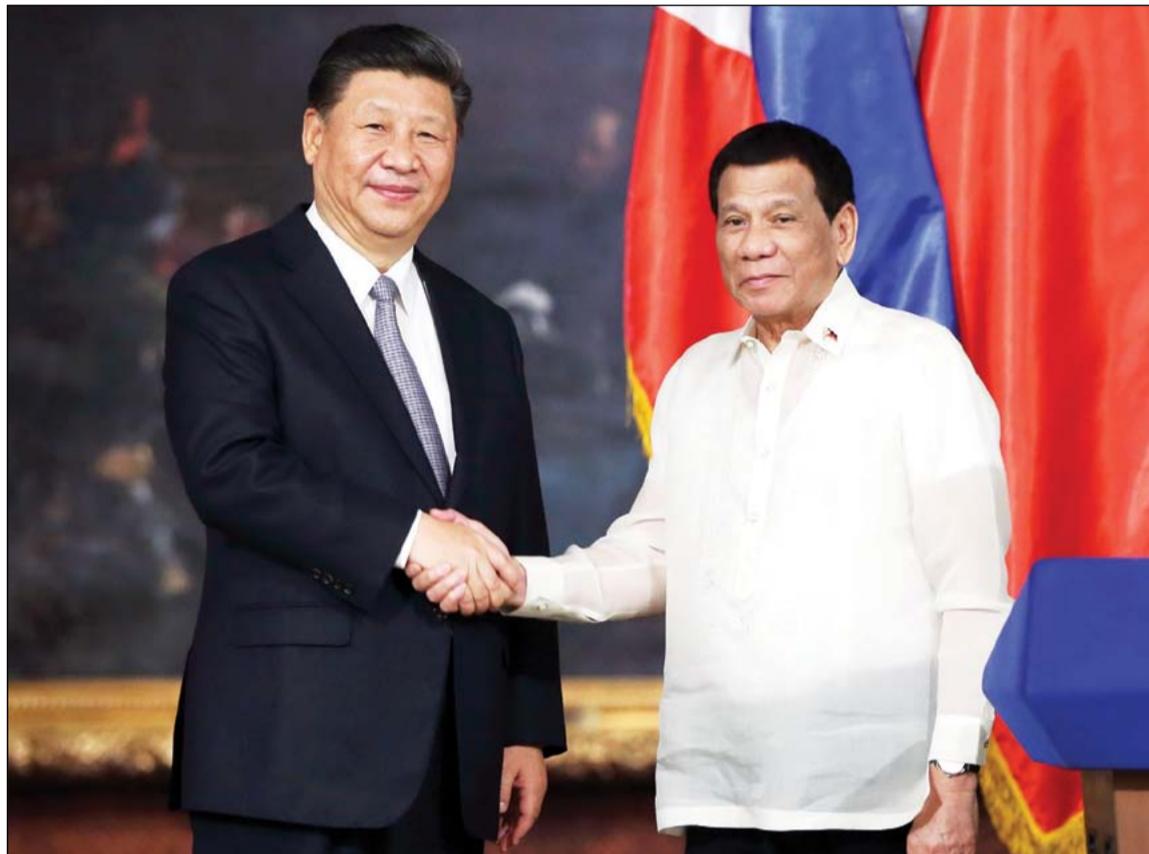
When the two leaders jointly met reporters, Xi said that his talks with Duterte were "friendly, in-depth and fruitful".

China and the Philippines have lots of common interests in the South China Sea, Xi said, adding that the two countries will continue to manage disagreements and promote maritime cooperation through friendly consultation.

China and the Philippines will work with members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to contribute to peace, stability and welfare in the region, Xi said.

The comprehensive strategic cooperative relationship sends a positive signal to the world regarding the China-Philippines friendship, Xi said.

"China and the Philippines must join hands to uphold the interests of the developing world, resist protectionism and unilateralism, and pro-



President Xi Jinping meets Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte in Manila on Nov 20. Xi arrived in the country's capital earlier in the day, and Duterte hosted a grand ceremony to welcome Xi before their talks. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

mote peace, stability and prosperity in our region and beyond," Xi said.

Xi pledged that China will import more goods from the Philippines, saying that Philippine coconuts and frozen fruits have been approved for export to China.

"As fellow developing countries in

Asia, China and the Philippines face similar developmental challenges, which make us natural partners with a common destiny," Xi said.

It is the only right choice for China and the Philippines, which have a history of nearly a thousand years of exchanges, to be friendly neighbors

and strive for win-win cooperation, Xi said.

Xi said that he has invited Duterte to attend the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, which will be held in Beijing in April.

Hailing Xi's visit as an important

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RODRIGO DUTERTE  
Philippine President

milestone for Philippines-China relations, Duterte said that it will open a new chapter in the development of bilateral ties.

"I am pleased with the current positive momentum of Philippines-China relations," Duterte said.

The Philippines would like to deepen its comprehensive strategic cooperative relationship with China on the basis of mutual respect, mutual understanding and equal sovereignty, he said, adding that the two countries should enhance cooperation in such areas as trade, investment, agriculture, defense, health, infrastructure and energy.

"We discussed mutual concerns on defense, security, maritime cooperation, law enforcement, transnational crime as well as strengthening our partnership in combating the trafficking of illegal drugs," he said.

## Philippines trip drives ties forward

First state visit of a Chinese president to the archipelago since 2005 marks milestone in relations

By CAO DESHENG  
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President Xi Jinping's state visit to the Philippines on Nov 20 and 21 marked a milestone in relations between the two countries, and will herald a new chapter for bilateral ties, said the Philippines Ambassador to China Jose Santiago L. Sta. Romana.

Xi's trip is the first state visit of a Chinese president to the Southeast Asian country since 2005.

The visit will push forward the positive trajectory of relations following Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte's state visit to China in October 2016, Sta. Romana said in an interview with *China Daily*.

"High-level exchanges serve as a compass, a guide for the two govern-

ments," Sta. Romana said. "There are challenges that still remain, but the basic thinking on the part of Duterte is to do business with China and have harmonious, friendly relations."

Sino-Philippine ties soured amid maritime disputes in the South China Sea, but began improving after Duterte became president in June 2016.

"We basically have an understanding that whatever differences we have should not be obstacles to promoting bilateral ties," Sta. Romana said, adding that managing differences and finding areas of cooperation are key to the rapid progress the countries have made in the past two years.

In terms of current bilateral relations, Sta. Romana said Manila is very satisfied with the situation.

"We follow the dual-track approach," he said. "We put the contentious issues on one track and put the noncontentious issues on another track. We fast track the noncontentious areas like trade, economics, investment, science, culture and education, where the two sides can progress in a mutually beneficial way."

As for the contentious issues, Sta. Romana said there are areas where the countries do not see eye to eye, but they can discuss them frankly and in a friendly way through a bilateral consultative mechanism.

He added that what drives ties forward are three pillars: economic cooperation, combating illegal drugs and terrorism, and people-to-people exchanges.

Bilateral trade reached \$51.3 bil-

lion in 2017, an increase of 8.5 percent over the previous year.

Sta. Romana said that despite challenges, the two sides have to promote ties with more determination.

In August, the Philippines assumed the role of country coordinator of relations between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

ASEAN and China are currently negotiating the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

Sta. Romana said his country hopes that during its two years as coordinator, various parties will be able to achieve a consensus and present an effective, binding code of conduct that helps ease tensions, manage disputes and explore areas of cooperation.

Speaking of some countries out-

side ASEAN attempting to complicate the South China Sea issue, Sta. Romana said ASEAN's position is very clear.

"We want a region including the South China Sea to be free of big powers' rivalries. We don't wish to see the deployment of modern and advanced weapons in the area, and we hope we can maintain a zone of peace, stability and friendship."

Sta. Romana praised the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, saying it converges with the Philippines' development priorities and ASEAN's master plan of connectivity.

"The key, I think, is how to make sure the China dream is shared by not only neighboring countries, but also the international community," he said.