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Chinese President Xi Jinping holds a welcoming ceremony for visiting President of the Republic of Honduras Iris Xiomara Castro Sarmiento in Beijing on June 12, 2023, before their talks in the Great Hall of the People. Photo: Xinhua

► Fruitful outcomes achieved as various docs signed including on BRI

Xi meets Honduras' Castro, guides bilateral ties to new high

By Chen Qingqing

Chinese President Xi Jinping held a meeting with visiting Honduran President Iris Xiomara Castro Sarmiento in the Great Hall of the People on Monday, as Castro became the first Honduran president to make a state visit to China, opening a new historical chapter in China-Honduras relations.

Officials and experts hailed the meeting as significant as it set the tone for bilateral relations and injected new momentum into bilateral cooperation, bringing it to a higher level.

President Xi extended a warm welcome to Castro and hailed her visit as one of special

XI'S MOMENTS

significance as it opens a new chapter in the annals of the China-Honduras relationship. Xi commended her unwavering political will as evidenced by the historic decision she made to fulfill her campaign promise of establishing diplo-

matic relations with China.

Honduras officially inaugurated its embassy in Beijing on Sunday three months after the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The Central American country severed its so-called "diplomatic" relations with Tai-

All-round China-Arab cooperation deepens at key biz conference

By Wang Cong, Tao Mingyang and Wan Hengyi

China and Arab countries are swiftly expanding economic and trade cooperation in all fields, as more than 3,500 Chinese and Arab officials and business representatives gathered in Riyadh, capital of Saudi Arabia from Sunday to Monday for a major business conference, in which dozens of deals worth billions of dollars were inked.

The business deals and great enthusiasm for cooperation seen at the 10th Arab-China Business Conference offered the latest sign of closer diplomatic and economic ties between China and Arab countries, following a slew of recent major developments, including the first China-Arab States Summit at the end of 2022 and China's contribution to the agreement on the resumption of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The close ties between China and Arab countries have drawn widespread global attention, as well as criticism from the West, particularly the US, which has tried to dominate the Arab world for decades and is relentlessly stepping up its containment of China. While the US tries to sabotage China-Arab ties, growing China-Arab cooperation is a clear rejection of the US' zero-sum games, Chinese and Arab experts noted.

All-round cooperation

On Sunday, the first day of the 10th Arab-China Business Conference, a total of 30 investment agreements worth \$10 billion were signed, covering a wide range of sectors, including technology, renewables, agriculture, real estate,

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Closer



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Unlike US lip service, pragmatic exchanges benefit regional devt

►Xi, from Page 1

wan island on March 25.

China will remain committed to developing friendly relations with Honduras, firmly support economic and social development in the country, and forge a good friendship and partnership with Honduras featuring mutual respect, equality, mutual benefit, and common development, Xi said during the meeting.

The Chinese top leader also expressed his readiness to work with the Honduran president from a strategic and long-term perspective to steer the bilateral relationship toward greater development and to turn the vision of cooperation into tangible results to the greater benefit of the two peoples.

Following the meeting, the two sides signed a number of cooperation documents including those related to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), quality inspection, trade, agriculture, tech, culture and education.

In the initial stage of China-Honduras relations, the two sides reached consensus on negotiating a free trade agreement and promoting practical cooperation in various fields, according to a joint statement released following the meeting.

The meeting between Chinese and Honduran leaders set the tone for China-Honduras relations, reflecting the high level of political mutual trust and respect for each other's development path, Pan Deng, executive director of the Latin American and Caribbean Region Law Center of China University of Political Science and Law, told the Global Times.

"While the two leaders pointed out the future direction for diplomatic

relations, those positive outcomes in the political field will soon be turned into full-scale cooperation between the two countries," Pan said.

During Castro's state visit to China, some senior officials from the Honduran delegation expressed high expectations for Honduras-China relations, which have been developing at a very fast pace, and more Honduran enterprises and people are willing to share the opportunities of the giant Chinese market.

Over the past week, a Honduran business delegation has visited various provinces in China and negotiated with local entrepreneurs, with cooperation intentions being reached in exporting Honduran products such as coffee, white shrimp and melon.

'Good friend, good partner'

The one-China principle is the first premise and political foundation of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Honduras and the development of bilateral ties, and it's believed that Honduras will fully meet its commitment, Xi told Castro during the meeting.

With the shift in its own strategic focus, the US has made many "empty promises" to Honduras in recent years, which prompted it to stand up to the pressure from Washington and establish diplomatic relations with China, Pan noted. "Compared with the empty promises from the US, China can provide pragmatic cooperation that benefits its development, which has become a consensus within political and business circles in Honduras," he said.

Castro said during the meeting that the establishment of diplomatic relations with China is a decision

made by the Honduran government that will go down in history. Honduras firmly supports and upholds the one-China principle, and firmly supports the Chinese government's efforts to achieve reunification.

The Xi-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative are conducive to building a safer and more secure world in line with people's expectations, which Honduras highly praises and will actively participate in, she noted.

After joining Belt and Road, China's experience in poverty reduction, education, infrastructure, logistics, science and technology will provide a reference for Honduras to overcome many structural problems, bringing new development opportunities for the country to better integrate into an interconnected and interactive world, said Cui Shoujun, professor of the school of international relations of Renmin University of China.

Shortly after the establishment of diplomatic ties with China, Honduras expressed willingness to join the BRI, which shows that the initiative has shown a positive demonstration effect overseas, making other countries willing to take the express train of China's development, Pan noted.

Furthermore, unlike other countries that previously established diplomatic relations with China, Honduras abolished the free trade agreement with China's Taiwan region while signing the joint communiqué on the establishment of diplomatic relations with China, which shows that Honduras attaches great importance and shares a bullish view on the Chinese market and economy, experts said.

Closer relations a clear rejection of US' zero-sum game: experts

►All-round, from Page 1

minerals, supply chains, tourism and healthcare, according to media reports.

The deals include a \$5.6 billion agreement between Saudi Arabia's Investment Ministry and Chinese carmaker Human Horizons for a joint venture and a \$266 million deal signed by Saudi Arabia with Hong Kong-based Android developer Hibobi Technology for tourism and other apps, media reports showed.

"In terms of areas covered, this is all-round cooperation," Liu Zhongmin, a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, told the Global Times on Monday, noting that in addition to traditional cooperation in energy, the two sides are also expanding cooperation in more areas such as technology.

Zhou Rong, a senior researcher at the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies of Renmin University of China, said that there is great interest from Saudi Arabia and other Arab states in boosting cooperation with China in various sectors other than energy, as they seek to cut reliance on the sector.

"There are broad prospects for bilateral cooperation and exchanges," Zhou told the Global Times on Monday.

While both China and Arab countries are seeking to further boost win-win cooperation, the US is reportedly concerned about the deepening cooperation between Riyadh and Beijing in security and sensitive high-tech sectors.

Just days before the Arab-China Business Conference, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Saudi Arabia. On Thursday, he said that Washington was not asking anyone to choose between the US and China, but said the US "remains the number one partner of choice" for most countries in the Persian Gulf region.

Rejecting US game

"Blinken is pretending to be unaware, [but] the US is no longer 'the number one partner of choice for most countries in the region'," Ebrahim Hashem, a China-based strategist and Asia Global Fellow at the Asia Global Institute of the University of Hong Kong, told the Global Times. "Regional countries have made a strategic decision to diversify their partners and the US is no longer the only partner. It is one of the partners."

This strategic decision by regional countries was on clear display at the Arab-China Business Conference. On Sunday, when asked about US criticism of Saudi Arabia's ties with China, Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said, "I totally ignore it."

"We came to recognize the reality of today that China is taking, had taken a lead, will continue to take that lead. We don't have to compete with China, we have to collaborate with China," he said. "We are Saudi Arabia, we don't have to be engaged in what I call a zero-sum game. We believe that there are so many global opportunities."

Liu said that while US officials mostly refrain from directly mentioning China, they are actually working to counter China's ties with Arab countries. "Saudi Arabia's reaction actually carries an implicit rejection of Blinken's statement," he said.

"The US probably did not expect such a huge change in the Middle East situation this year. It also has an unexpected and bewildered feeling about its own decline and the rise of other major powers," Liu said.

►Bidding farewell to Berlusconi



People stand at the entrance of the San Raffaele hospital in Milan, where the former prime minister of Italy Silvio Berlusconi was hospitalized and has passed away, on June 12, 2023. Photo: VCG