

Relations with Suriname set to strengthen

Presidents vow to spur investments in green growth, digital economy

By XU WEI

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President Xi Jinping and visiting Surinamese President Chandrikapersad Santokhi made joint pledges on April 12 to foster an even closer bilateral strategic partnership. The two leaders agreed to expand cooperation on investment, green development, education, and the digital economy.

Xi rolled out the red carpet for Santokhi, who was making a week-long state visit to China, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, in a pomp-filled ceremony that included a guard of honor and a 21-gun salute.

"China is willing to work with Suriname to further consolidate political mutual trust, strengthen economic and trade cooperation, expand people-to-people exchanges, enhance international collaboration, and promote the healthy and stable development of China-Suriname relations," Xi told his guest.

The two heads of state also witnessed the signing of a series of cooperation documents. Xi underlined Beijing's readiness to welcome the import of more high-quality products from Suriname.

He told his guest that the nation stands ready to deepen cooperation with Suriname on jointly building the Belt and Road and expand cooperation in areas such as agriculture, energy, and mining.

He noted that Suriname is one of the countries in the Caribbean with the largest overseas Chinese community and is the first in the Western Hemisphere to designate the Chinese Spring Festival as an official holiday.

Both sides should continue to encourage cultural exchanges, facilitate people-to-people exchanges, and jointly develop Confucius Institutes, Xi said.

He also highlighted the need to bolster subnational cooperation to keep enriching bilateral exchanges and cooperation.



President Xi Jinping and visiting Surinamese President Chandrikapersad Santokhi attend a welcome ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on April 12. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

China stands ready to work with developing nations like Suriname to strengthen multilateral coordination, solidarity, and cooperation, safeguard common interests, and achieve common development, he added.

Xi reiterated China's emphasis on developing ties with Caribbean countries, saying that the nation supports countries in the region in seeking prosperity and development and enhancing public well-being, and it makes continuous steps to offer aid to the best of its capacity.

Santokhi, who was visiting China for the first time since taking office in 2020, lauded the major significance of the initiatives proposed by the Chinese president on upholding multilateralism and promoting global peace and sustainable development.

"Our talks today are also important first steps in solidifying the strategic cooperative partnership and identify-

ing new areas of cooperation," Santokhi told his host.

He stressed readiness to further enhance exchanges between political parties from both countries, and expand cooperation in areas including investment, green development, and the response to climate change.

Santokhi also met separately on April 12 with Premier Li Qiang and Wang Huning, chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

According to a joint communique released by the two nations, China will continue to provide Suriname with necessary assistance through bilateral and multilateral channels for development financing.

According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, trade between China and Suriname grew by 7.7 percent year-on-year to \$384 million in 2023, with

China's imports from the Caribbean country up by 19.1 percent.

China mainly exports electromechanical products, steel, furniture, textiles, plastic products, agricultural products, tires, and clothing to Suriname, while importing raw wood and sawed timber.

Cui Shoujun, founder and director of the Center for Latin American Studies at the Renmin University of China, said stronger cooperation with China can help Suriname, one of the least developed countries in the world, in improving its infrastructure, alleviating its power shortages and bolstering its exports.

"Suriname is also confronted with severe challenges from rising sea levels and climate change. Strengthening partnership with China can enable the nation to bolster its capacity in climate change mitigation and adaptation," he said.

Santokhi hails China's growth

BRI helped turn country into key hub in South America, says Suriname president

By ZHANG YUNBI

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President of Suriname Chandrikapersad Santokhi revisited his childhood links with China during an exclusive interview with China Daily in Beijing on April 14.

"When I was a little kid of three or four, my mother used to work in a Chinese supermarket," Santokhi said, adding that today he is familiar with Chinese traditions, culture, and cuisine because of it.

He said his childhood interactions with the Chinese community have helped him understand and communicate with the Chinese people better.

The largest concentration of overseas Chinese living in the Caribbean is in Suriname, a scenic country situated on the northern coast of South America.

Last year, the government of Suriname celebrated the 170th anniversary of Chinese settlement in the country as a national event.

Santokhi praised "the strength of the Chinese community in Suriname", and noted that even in remote areas of his country, there are "the Chinese groceries, Chinese supermarkets, and Chinese businesses to serve the community".

"They're always one of (those) supporting the economic growth," he said.

China and Suriname established diplomatic ties 48 years ago, with Suriname being one of the first countries in the region to build diplomatic relations with China.

Santokhi reiterated the pledge his nation made at that time about the Taiwan question and underscored Suriname's adherence to the one-China principle.

"We are reiterating that China is a big country, that China is in a process of reunification, and that we are supporting that reunification process," he said.

Santokhi arrived in Beijing on April 11 for his first state visit to China. This year marks the fifth anniversary of the China-Suriname strategic cooperative partnership, which was established in 2019.

President Xi Jinping held a welcoming ceremony for Santokhi on April 12 in Beijing.

Santokhi referred to food security as a promising area of cooperation because the world is confronted with the challenge of food scarcity while the world population is increasing.

"In Suriname, we have a lot of fertile land, and here is China with modern technology in the area of food production, food processing, and food security. We can cooperate

and deliver our contribution to food security for the world."

He also hailed China's role "in the area of supporting the regional integration" and boosting connectivity in terms of roads and bridges in South America.

The two governments signed a cooperation plan in 2019 to jointly advance the construction of the Belt and Road.

In contrast to voices of suspicion and smear campaigns against the Belt and Road Initiative, Santokhi said, "The Belt and Road Initiative is one that is playing a very important role in bringing development for a lot of nations and people, and we are making good use of it and we're benefiting from the BRI".

Santokhi hailed the roads built in Suriname to help villagers in remote areas and hospitals that served to control the COVID-19 pandemic.

He added that the BRI has helped boost connectivity in the region and made his country an economic hub in South America.

During his China tour, Santokhi said he was getting a better understanding of China's past and present, including the achievements made since 1978, when the process of reform and opening-up started.

He said that "hard work" and "unity" were the driving forces behind China's success.

China's technical assistance programs and financial aid are very important, but the philosophy "is more important to learn", he said. "I hope that we can learn a lot from China based on its history and spirit, and we can become a country which can be also very influential," Santokhi said, adding that he hoped Suriname would become a strong and developed country.