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3rd Belt and Road Forum and Future Developments for BRI



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Introduction:

The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, commonly referred to as the Belt and Road Forum or BRFC, serves as an international platform for political and economic discussions related to the Belt and Road Initiative. This forum facilitates the development of action plans to implement the initiative in key areas such as infrastructure, energy, resource management, production capacity, trade, investment, and the identification of major projects. Furthermore, it acts as a platform for signing cooperation agreements with countries and international organizations, covering financial cooperation mechanisms, collaboration in science, technology, and environmental protection, as well as fostering exchanges, training, and financing agreements for supporting projects.

The first forum took place on May 14 and 15, 2017, in Beijing and witnessed the participation of 29 foreign heads of state, government officials, and representatives from over 130 countries and 70 international organizations. Second Belt and Road Forum occurred from April 25 to 27, 2019, in Beijing, with 37 heads of state in attendance, along with approximately five thousand other representatives. During this





second forum, 283 projects, agreements, or initiatives under the Belt and Road Initiative were identified, solidifying the initiative's progress.

In the course of the second forum, China's Ministry of Ecology and Environment introduced the BRI International Green Development Coalition as a collaborative project involving environmental agencies from 25 other countries.

The Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF III) convened on October 17 and 18, 2023, in Beijing, attracting participation from President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China and high-level representatives from leaders of over 150 countries.

The third BRF for International Cooperation marks a significant milestone in the Belt and Road Initiative's journey and underscores China's dedication to global development and connectivity. Its timing is noteworthy, taking place amidst global geopolitical tensions and economic uncertainties, spanning from conflicts in Europe and the Middle East to a sluggish global economy. Helga Zepp-LaRouche, the founder of the Germany-based think tank the Schiller Institute, has highlighted the BRI's role in unifying humanity and fostering shared prosperity. She believes that the Belt and Road Initiative has become the most extensive infrastructure undertaking in history and is laying the economic foundation for a global community with a shared future.

Despite challenges and adjustments encountered along the way, the Belt and Road Initiative's achievements and inclusive nature are acknowledged by the participating countries. The forum presents an opportunity to strengthen partnerships, discuss high-quality cooperation, and demonstrate the advantages of a shared vision for global



development. The decisions made at this forum will help shape the future of global connectivity and cooperation. This article will thus focus on the significance of the Belt and Road Forum and its prospective benefits for more than 150 nations participating in this initiative.

Decade of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, also known as the New Silk Road, stands as one of the most ambitious infrastructure endeavors ever envisioned. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In the past ten years, the BRI's collaborative network has expanded from the Eurasian continent to include regions in Africa and Latin America. More than 150 countries and over 30 international organizations have entered into cooperative agreements with China under the BRI. China has hosted three Belt and Road Forums (BRFs) and, in partnership with cooperating nations, initiated over 20 multilateral dialogue and cooperation platforms across various sectors, including railways, ports, finance, taxation, energy, environmental sustainability, green investments, disaster risk reduction, anti-corruption efforts, think tanks, media, and cultural exchanges, among others.

Since its announcement by President Xi Jinping in 2013, the BRI has played a pivotal role in promoting economic integration, fostering interconnected development, and delivering benefits to a wide range of nations. It has set the stage for mutual benefit, win-win co-operation, prosperity, and development in an era marked by turbulence and change.



Throughout the past decade, the BRI has served as a beacon of development, offering renewed impetus for global progress. Focusing on development that best serves the common interests of all nations, it has provided an inclusive platform that promotes the collective prosperity of China's global partners. Notably, between 2013 and 2022, the total value of China's trade in goods with key Belt and Road partner countries surged at an average annual rate of 8.6 per cent, with two-way investments exceeding \$270 billion. Newly signed contracts for projects have reached over \$1.2 trillion, resulting in numerous infrastructure endeavors, including roads, bridges, and ports, further enhancing land, maritime, air, and cyberspace connectivity

Belt and Road cooperation has effectively harmonized development strategies and practical needs among its partners, facilitating the transformation of partner countries' advantages into tangible development outcomes. Over the past decade, overseas cooperative



industrial parks like the Thailand-China Rayong Industrial Zone and Ethiopia's Eastern Industry Zone have thrived, acting as catalysts for local industrialization and modernization. The World Bank estimates that by 2030, Belt and Road cooperation will annually generate a benefit of \$1.6 trillion for the world, contributing to 1.3 per cent of global GDP and infusing substantial momentum into global development.



Over the past decade, the BRI has also aided in lifting nearly 40 million people out of poverty, paving the way for opportunities and prosperity for local populations. Numerous 'small yet impactful' livelihood programs, including schools, hospitals, and stadiums, have been established, enhancing the quality of life and fostering a sense of happiness and well-being. The China-Europe Railway Express has performed over 15,000 freight services, acting as a lifeline by delivering medical supplies during the pandemic. Earlier this year, the China-aided African Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) headquarters, boasting modern office facilities and state-of-the-art laboratories, was successfully inaugurated. In response to the global food crisis, China and its BRI partners have actively engaged in agricultural cooperation, disseminating practical technologies such as hybrid rice and Juncao, contributing to bolstering food security for local communities.

With the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development facing obstacles, nations across the globe are expressing a growing desire for development and cooperation. Many developing countries have seized the opportunity presented by the BRI, opening up horizons for industrial enhancements, energy transformation, and innovative development in these countries. Under the framework of Belt and Road cooperation, China has energetically conducted talent exchange activities and research collaborations. Through initiatives like the Luban Workshops, China has established vocational workshops in more than 20 countries, providing vocational and technical training for local youth and thereby bolstering the internal growth engines of these nations



i. **BRI Infrastructure Networks:**

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) primarily aims to enhance physical infrastructure along land corridors that roughly follow the historical Silk Road routes. With the introduction of China's 'Belt and Road Initiative', it has gained renewed significance and attracted new audiences. These "belts" and a maritime silk road make up the initiative, encompassing infrastructure corridors spanning approximately 60 countries, primarily in Asia and Europe, with additional participation from Oceania and East Africa. The estimated cost of these projects falls within the range of US\$4 to 8 trillion. In contrast, it has been compared to two US-centric trade arrangements, the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

The projects within the initiative receive financial backing from the Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, with technical coordination managed by the B&R Summit Forum. The land corridors include:

- i. The New Eurasian Land Bridge, which stretches from Western China to Western Russia through Kazakhstan, including the Silk Road Railway traversing China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region, Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland, and Germany.
- ii. Another corridor runs from Northern China through Mongolia to the Russian Far East. In 2012, the Russian government-established Russian Direct Investment Fund and China's China Investment Corporation, a Chinese sovereign wealth fund, joined forces to establish the Russia-China Investment Fund, focusing on opportunities for bilateral integration.



- iii. The China–Central Asia–West Asia Corridor, connecting Western China to Turkey.
- iv. The China-Indochina Peninsula economic corridor, running from Southern China to Singapore.
- v. The Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network, transforming Nepal from a landlocked to a land-linked country.
- vi. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), closely associated with the Belt and Road Initiative, comprises a collection of infrastructure projects worth US\$62 billion aimed at rapidly modernizing Pakistan's transportation networks, energy infrastructure, and economy. On November 13, 2016, CPEC became partially operational when Chinese cargo was transported overland to Gwadar Port for onward maritime shipment to Africa and West Asia. CPEC and the development of Gwadar port infrastructure are particularly significant as they offer alternative routes independent of the Malacca Strait.

This emphasis on connectivity represents the core focus of BRI efforts because China's remarkable economic growth has been sustained by exports and the overland import of substantial quantities of raw materials and intermediate components. By 2022, China had constructed cross-border highways and expressway networks to nearly all its neighbouring regions.

ii. **Green and Clean Energy Development through BRI in Partner Countries:**

In building a green Silk Road, China has not only expressed its commitment but has taken concrete actions. As the world's largest market and equipment manufacturer in the clean energy sector, China has engaged in green energy cooperation with over 100

countries and regions. In Belt and Road partner countries, Chinese investments in green and low-carbon energy have surpassed those in traditional energy sources. This shift promotes a better balance between socio-economic development and environmental protection, creating green development opportunities for participating countries and providing benefits to local communities.



In Pakistan's Punjab province, solar farms double as spaces for cultivating plants and fruits under the solar panels. Along Kenya's Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway, railroad bridges feature large passages allowing tall animals like giraffes to cross with ease. In Senegal, China is actively involved in Dakar's wastewater treatment project, improving water quality in the area and revitalizing the beachfront environment, benefiting hundreds of thousands of residents. In Ghana, the Sunon Asogli Power Plant, supported by China, has been completed and supplies 25 per cent of Ghana's electricity demand, addressing local electricity shortages with clean and green energy. In Kazakhstan, projects like the Zhanatas Wind Power Station and the Turgusun hydropower station, delivered with the participation of Chinese enterprises, have significantly advanced the country's green and low-carbon development. These scenes not only showcase tangible outcomes from the BRI but also underscore how Belt and

Road cooperation is turning the vision of green development into reality through concrete actions.

In the future, guided by the vision of green development and supported by various cooperation platforms, this collective endeavor to build a green and clean energy infrastructure will undoubtedly yield more benefits for people worldwide and contribute to the creation of a harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature.

Theme and Future Goals of 3rd Belt and Road Forum:

The 3rd Belt and Road Forum (BRF) is themed "High-quality Belt and Road Cooperation: Together for Common Development and Prosperity." Three high-level forums were held under the topics of Connectivity in an Open World Economy, Green Silk Road for Harmony with Nature, and Digital Economy as a New



Source of Growth, respectively. Six thematic forums with focuses on Trade Connectivity, Maritime Cooperation, Clean Silk Road, Think Tank Exchanges, People-to-People Bonds, and Subnational Cooperation were respectively convened.

The BRI, focusing on connectivity, has promoted the development of connectivity networks led by economic corridors, with major transportation passages and information highways as the backbone, underpinned by railways, ports, and pipelines, encompassing land, sea, air, and the internet. China has conducted more than 3,000



cooperation projects with relevant parties, mobilizing investment of nearly USD 1 trillion.

The participants recognize that the BRI has rejuvenated the Silk Road spirit of peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning, and mutual benefit. The Belt and Road cooperation upholds the principle of extensive consultation, joint efforts, and shared benefits, the approach of open, green, and clean cooperation, and the pursuit of high-standard, people-centered, and sustainable development.

The participants expect strengthened efforts to usher in a new stage of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, aiming to better contribute to promoting international cooperation, boosting global economic growth, accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and shaping a bright future of peace, development, and win-win cooperation.

China and partner countries have agreed to focus on and enhance cooperation in the following areas of the BRI:

i. Building a Multidimensional Connectivity Network:

China will speed up the high-quality development of the China-Europe Railway Express, participate in the trans-Caspian international transportation corridor, host the China-Europe Railway Express Cooperation Forum, and make joint efforts to build a new logistics corridor across the Eurasian continent linked by direct railway and road transportation. China will vigorously integrate ports, shipping, and trading services under the "Silk Road Maritime Cooperation" and accelerate the building of the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor and the Air Silk Road.



ii. Promoting Advanced Technology and Green Development:

Participants will continue to deepen cooperation in areas such as green infrastructure, green energy, and green transportation, and step up support for the BRI International Green Development Coalition.

China will continue to implement the Belt and Road Science, Technology, and Innovation Cooperation Action Plan, hold the First Belt and Road Conference on Science and Technology Exchange, increase the number of joint laboratories built with other parties to 100 in the next five years, and support young scientists from other countries to work on short-term programs in China. At this Forum, China put forward the Global Artificial Intelligence (AI) Governance Initiative and ready to increase exchanges and dialogue with other countries and jointly promote the sound, orderly, and secure AI development in the world.

iii. Enhancing Maritime Cooperation:

The ocean, often referred to as "the Blue Engine," plays an increasingly important role in world economic development. The participants support the promotion of the development, transformation, and upgrade of marine industries and the development of a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive blue economy based on clean production, green technologies, and the circular economy. They agree to deepen marine science and technology cooperation, share knowledge and outcomes of marine sustainable development, and facilitate the harmonization of marine technological standards and marine technology transfer. China and relevant partners jointly launched the Belt and Road Blue Cooperation Initiative.



iv. Strengthening Subnational Cooperation:

The Belt and Road cooperation partners support the advancement of the building of subnational cooperation platforms, fostering more friendly partnerships among subnational governments in places with strong economic complementarity and industrial linkages. This is aimed at better leveraging respective advantages on industrial structures and resource endowment, promoting mutually beneficial cooperation in priority areas of poverty reduction, urban governance, digital economy, green and innovative development, capacity building, and facilitating common development. They agree to continuously deepen subnational people-to-people exchanges, expanding and consolidating the base of friendly relations in terms of benefits and public support.

v. Promoting Think Tank Exchanges

The participants endorse the idea of empowering think tanks, experts, and scholars to collaborate in conducting joint research, leveraging their unique professional strengths. They aim to investigate tangible routes and prospective directions for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). They also promote think tanks to engage in activities related to the BRI, facilitate academic exchanges, extend collaborative networks, and disseminate current research findings through forums, symposiums, and visiting scholar programs. The goal is to consistently enhance the content and profundity of studies associated with the BRI.



vi. **Enhancing People-to-People Exchanges**

The Belt and Road cooperation partners encourages political parties, parliaments, civil societies, media, think tanks, and business communities to assume more significant roles in cultivating interpersonal connections between people. They anticipate increased exchanges and collaboration in various fields, including art, culture, education, science and technology, tourism, health, and sports. Furthermore, China will execute the Belt and Road Future Leaders Program, establish a Belt and Road Fund dedicated to people-to-people connectivity, and carry out the "Silk Road People-to-People Connectivity" initiative.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aligns with the concept of a global community of shared future and actively translates relevant ideas into practical actions in the context of the current era. It addresses critical aspects of the world, such as development, security, openness, cooperation, civilization, and governance. The BRI offers not just a conceptual framework but also a tangible roadmap that allows all nations to work together toward achieving shared development and prosperity.

Conclusion:

As the Belt and Road Initiative enters its next prosperous decade, the shared consensus among participating countries regarding high-quality Belt and Road cooperation holds great significance. Through collaborative endeavors, this initiative is poised to usher in new opportunities for the global economy, delivering greater benefits to all. The Belt and Road Initiative has revitalized a rich history of cultural exchanges spanning over two millennia, inspiring more than 150 countries to pursue new aspirations. In the



decade since its inception, BRI cooperation has brought about profound and remarkable transformations globally, marking a significant milestone in human history. The BRI is a long-term, transnational, and systematic global project of the 21st century, and it has taken its initial steps successfully. Building upon this new beginning, the BRI is poised to exhibit even greater creativity and vitality, fostering greater openness and inclusivity, and creating fresh opportunities for both China and the world at large.

Anticipating future challenges, the BRIFC remains committed to overcoming obstacles by uniting all stakeholders, working collaboratively, and persisting in its mission to elevate extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits to new heights. With collective effort, cooperation will prosper, and the BRI can look forward to an even brighter future.

China is ready to cooperate closely with other nations under the BRI framework, implementing the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative. The aim is to establish an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and shared prosperity. The ultimate goals are to pass on the torch of peace across generations, sustain development, ensure the flourishing of civilizations, and build a global community of shared future.