

BOTTOM LINE

Xi Jinping defends China's economy policy in Africa



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

CHINA'S President, Xi Jinping visited Tanzania, South Africa and Republic of Congo from March 24 to 30. The fact that African countries are on Xi's first overseas trip as president shows the importance China's new leadership attaches to Sino-African interactions. China policy towards Africa largely rests on the following: First, China needs access to African raw materials, especially minerals (ore, iron and oil), to fuel its strong industrial economy. Second, it relies on the political support of African nations in international forums such as the United Nations. Third, Beijing seeks eventually to replace Taipei in those four countries that continue to recognise Taiwan. Fourth, China grasped sooner than the United States that Africa's more than one billion people and growing middle class offer an attractive market for its exports.

Since the founding of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2000, the two sides have been making headway in deepening their cooperation in a variety of fields, and China overtook the United States to become Africa's largest trading partner in 2009.

China's trade with all African countries, including Libya and Egypt, reached nearly \$200 billion in total value in 2012, an increase of 19.3% from 2011, according to Chinese customs statistics.

By the end of 2012, China's direct investment in Africa had accumulated to nearly \$20 billion, with 75% going to sectors such as finance, processing and manufacturing, trade-related services, agriculture and transportation. To date, more than 2,000 Chinese enterprises have invested in 50 African countries, with the majority of their employees Africans.

Many African officials have voiced concerns that China's dominance as an exporter of cheap garments, appliances and other goods, and its appetite for unprocessed raw materials, have impeded economic ties and undermined African hopes to advance into industrial prosperity.

"China takes our primary goods and sells us manufactured ones," the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Lamido Sanusi, wrote in *The Financial Times* in March of this year. "This was also the essence of colonialism."

Given the above background, the Chinese president arrived in Tanzania on March 24 for a two-day visit. On March 25 Xi delivered his defense of China's economic stake in many African countries in a speech in Dar es Salaam, the seaside economic hub of Tanzania.

He sought to assure African countries that his government would heed complaints that Chinese companies were impeding African efforts to run their local industry and jobs, and he promised aid, scholarships and technology transfers in an effort to counter those worries.

"China frankly faces up to the new circumstances and new problems in Sino-African relations," Xi told the audience, which regularly interrupted his speech with applause. "China has and will continue to work alongside African countries to take practical measures to appropriately solve problems in trade and economic cooperation so that African countries gain more from that cooperation."

It is good to note that the Chinese president did not avoid the concerns of African leaders and assured them that China would not exploit their resources without giving dividends in return for the benefit of African people.

Xi said China would abide by a promise made in 2012 to provide \$20 billion in loans over three years for African infrastructure development, farming and businesses. He announced a plan to provide training for 30,000 Africans over the next three years, including 18,000 scholarships to study abroad -- apparently in China..

"We will strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation with African countries in agricultural, manufacturing and other spheres, helping these countries convert their resource advantages into developmental advantages," he said in the address, broadcast on Chinese television.

"This will not change at all because of China's own growth and rising international stature," he said. "I can clearly tell all my friends here that under new circumstances, the importance of Sino-African relations will not decline, but will instead rise."

From Tanzania, he visited South Africa where he

attended the 5th BRICS Summit (acronym for Brazil, Russia., India. China and South Africa) in Durban. Trade among the five countries reached \$ 282 billion in 2012 and by 2015 it may increase to more than \$500 billion, according to a report.

This economic grouping represents more than a quarter of the world's land area, more than 40% of the world's population, and almost 25% of the world's economic growth. (As of 2012, GDPs of these countries are: China \$8.25 trillion, Brazil \$ 2.4 trillion, Russia \$1.95 trillion, India \$1.9 trillion and South Africa \$390 billion).

The BRICS grouping of emerging powers has reached a deal to establish BRICS Development Bank, initially with \$50 billion, which would rival Western-backed World Bank. It is reported that a Chinese banker could lead the Bank. The Bank is likely to focus on infrastructure and financing among member-countries.

On March 29, the Chinese president ended his trip to Africa in the Republic of Congo. Xi said he wanted to raise ties with Congo "to a new and higher level." Congo is a major oil producer.

He told parliament in the capital, Brazzaville: "The future, the development of China will be an unprecedented opportunity for Africa, and Africa's development will be the same for my country. We expect to work together with our African friends to seize upon historic opportunities and deepen cooperation ... in order to bring greater benefit to the Chinese and African peoples."

Last September, a total of 38 students from the Republic of Congo left for China on scholarships by the Chinese government. In July last year, through the initiative of Republic of Congo, a Chinese cultural week was marked in the country.

During the visit he signed a string of deals and pledged to bolster bilateral economic cooperation. The deals include a river port in Oyo, Congolese President Denis Sassou Nguesso's hometown, and a sea port in Pointe-Noire that can export mineral ores shipments.

Finally, it is good to note that the Chinese president did not avoid the concerns of African leaders and assured them that China would not exploit their resources without giving dividends in return for the benefit of African people.

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Technology to the rescue

TAHER ALI

BUSINESS activities are being hampered due to political unrest and frequent shutdowns across the country. Technology can help run businesses in many ways even in this political instability. In recent times the opposition have called for frequent shutdowns, and they are becoming very stern about their demands. In addition to losing many working days because of *hartal*, we have lost many valuable lives that cannot be given back. Furthermore, private and public assets have been damaged, including cars, buses, trains etc. The bottom line is that the businesses have been held up and as a result severe losses have been incurred.

Considering the facts, the government has taken some initiatives to run businesses properly, which is praiseworthy because at least it is trying to provide solutions. But these initiatives are not enough to help cover the losses incurred due to political unrest, businessmen also need to work together to get the best result in this type of situation.

In this regard, businessmen can use the blessings of technology for their own sake since they cannot stop *hartal*. Although technology does not have a solution for *hartal*, it can provide alternative solutions which will prevent the businesses from being fully handicapped. It is been proved that technology can give competitive advantages over competitors and undoubtedly increases productivity and saves time. For this reason, smart businessmen have adopted technology where they can afford to implement it. The smart businessmen who have adopted technology should use it properly to get all the advantages, and those who have not implemented it yet in all the areas must do so quickly. Because of frequent shutdowns and the volatile situation, they must use technology to give their business a better shape.



Technology has been helping businesses in many ways for many years. Now, amidst this political turmoil, businessmen have to ensure that they take maximum advantage of technology so that they can overcome the problems that occur due to frequent shutdowns.

First of all, teleconferencing can help them a lot. In addition to conducting internal meetings with branch offices, meetings can be conducted with customers, which will reduce cost and save time. Videoconferencing will add another dimension to teleconferencing and here both the parties can watch the each other on the screen. This will build more trust.

Secondly, customer service is important to businesses and the quality of that service will either enhance or degrade customer loyalty to the company and brand. There are chances that customer service can be hampered during shutdowns and sometimes deadlines cannot be met. Technology can help in this regard and better customer service can be provided during shutdowns through email and online chat, which will bring business closer to customers. At the same time, customer call centre with hotline and latest phone equipment and computer network environment with internet and cloud technology can help businesses provide 24/7 service. Thus, they can make their customers happy and loyal by using technology properly.

Email marketing is an effective and low cost method to reach a large group of people with business related information. Mobile marketing is a relatively new trend that reaches people through text messaging, and advertising on mobile applications that tie customers into what is happening with the business. Thus, marketing related activities will not be fully stopped during *hartal*.

Cell phones have become necessities for employers and employees and these devices are helpful for staying in touch with customers from anywhere with mobile network connectivity. Smart phones have introduced more features in a small handheld device. Now most of the tasks can be completed with smart phone including sending and receiving email and working on other application software from anywhere. It will work just like a personal computer. It is even possible to access the office PC remotely from home, ensuring that security is not compromised, and work on that PC.

It can be said that technology has been helping businesses in many ways for many years. Now, amidst this political turmoil, businessmen have to ensure that they take maximum advantage of technology so that they can overcome the problems that occur due to frequent shutdowns.

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The Sunset Boulevard

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ATTITUDES depend on what an individual feels and thinks of a particular idea or subject; if fixed deeply they cannot be changed quickly. The necessity of senior citizens' home is the subject matter of this writing.

A deeply ingrained resistance toward this concept deprives many families from living in harmony by accepting the inevitable changes. That heaven can be attained by serving a mother is not doubted, and that it is right under her feet (Al jannat tahata aqdamul ummahat) is a beautiful symbolism in the Arabic language. Her feet do not have to be in the vicinity for her child to attain the recompense. Making her last days peaceful is surely a way to Paradise.

There are changes galore, but the situation demands that only a few be touched upon. This is a three-party deal, where the offspring, the mother and the Home are involved. This article deals with female senior citizens, female pensioners and their children belonging to the middle income group. Problems of the very affluent and paupers need to be addressed differently.

Children living abroad, instead of dumping a parent with uninterested relatives or renting an apartment and leaving her with a mercenary, illiterate maid, can place her in an institution where medical and daily care is guaranteed, emergencies are met, and accidents averted. The present trend of exodus of children to foreign lands makes a reversal of age-old attitudes imperative.

Families living in apartments do not usually have the luxury of allotting a single room to a parent. Usually, she has to share a room with the grandchildren, much to the latter's annoyance. Blaring TVs, high pitched laughter, little squabbles, high-powered electric bulbs are jarring to old, ill and weary eyes and ears. Moreover, this atmosphere is not conducive for prayer, meditation and short naps.

The wind of change has converted the docile daughters-in-law of the forties and fifties into educated and economically emancipated women. They are unable to play the roles of their mothers and grandmothers. Paucity of time and absence of reliable household help happen to be their hindrances. Can their salary be sacrificed at the altar of duty?

Obviously, the aged too have their strong perceptions. There are those whose expectations are limitless. Immune to the difficulties faced by her child, she obtusely regresses to the time when she as a young mother had poured all her love, time and attention, and now in return expects the same tender care. The "Home" is viewed as a prison and her departure to it a

betrayal of trust. Little does she understand that caring for a baby was a pride and a pleasure but caring for a paralysed or bedridden parent is a pressure in this busy world. Counselling is needed for some parents too.

Hopefully, these barriers will disappear in the time to come. For, were people not averse to the idea of nuclear families, to family planning, to female education and other such notions? These issues have been accepted because of their fruitful outcome. Thus, a positive feedback is vital for this idea to gain firm



Leaving one's home and precious memories behind is not easy, it is not a spree or a short, pleasant journey. It is a move for good; for most it is the last stop, far from the maddening crowd, to wait for the curtain to fall and oblivion descend. If accepted with a positive attitude it augurs well for mental health.

ground.

Of late, there has been a growth of a different kind of senior citizens. Some are highly educated pensioners, some financially secure educated widows, some with passable education but not averse to moving into a Home. Preservation of self-respect, security and provision of health care are their prime needs. This surely is awakening. Leaving one's home and precious memories behind is not easy, it is not a spree or a short, pleasant journey. It is a move for good; for most it is the last stop, far from the maddening crowd, to wait for the curtain to fall and

oblivion descend. If accepted with a positive attitude it augurs well for mental health.

As regards the third party -- the Home -- much is desired from it; honesty, sincerity, accountability, care-giving and discipline are the minimum expectations. Its objectives differ from those of hotels and hospitals; its guests or patients are the old, the infirm, the dependent, and the lonely, people who have few visitors and thus are unable to voice their discomfort. With corruption eating into the vitals of Bangladesh, the administration should be vigilant. Insensate, lethargic and mercenary staff should not be tolerated. Rapport with residents, regular supervision, etc. helps in maintaining an ethical outlook. Commercial gain should not stand in the way of service.

Years back, in the year 2001 under the initiative of the late Dr. Nurunahar Faizunnesa, like-minded persons like Dr. Niaz Zaman, Mrs. Mazharul Islam, the late Mrs. Zebunnisa Majid, Professor Jahanara Haq and myself had tried to set up an Old Home. The name chosen was Begum Rokeya Proben Abash. Sad to say, endless toil and sincere efforts led to nothing but a negative response from society. Bonafide residents to be were there but were afraid to approach their children and wanted assurances of secrecy. Preposterous! Anyhow, against the backdrop of this negativism the project was closed. The donations received were returned to the donors. It was sheer heartbreak for us. Our target group was retired working women and the affluent aged who could pay for their upkeep and the elderly whose expenses would be paid by their children living abroad.

Unexpectedly and to my great advantage, my children's friend from USA invited me to accompany her to an institution in Savar a Trust which has a Home. I was happy to see that something that we had wanted to set up in 2001 now existed in a rudimentary form at Savar. At the moment, five apartments have been rented in five separate buildings and fourteen residents are living in them in security. Here, the services of doctors, nurses, and ambulance are guaranteed round the clock.

Their plans are very ambitious and promising, and even include ownership of cottages. So, times have changed and the existence of a Proben Abash is a reality. Who makes the stone roll is not important but that it has started rolling is. The Secretary General of the Trust shared with us the ambitious plan that the Trust has in mind for the future. The plans and blue prints laid out on the table promise a safe future for the old. I wish the Trust good luck in its efforts to provide a safe haven for the elderly in our community.