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'XI JINPING'S 3-NATION TOUR THIS APRIL WAS STRATEGICALLY TIMED'

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Xi Jinping's three-nation four-day (April 14-18) tour to Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia has been described by China's official media as an "important strategic initiative". The visit was carefully crafted so that China does not appear overbearing and it could win over the three Southeast Asian nations. For instance, keeping in mind that Vietnam had not endorsed the term "common destiny" in the joint statement issued during Vietnamese Communist Party General Secretary To Lam's visit to Beijing in August 2024, Xi Jinping did not speak of a "community of common destiny", but chose instead to speak of a "community with a shared future". Importantly, the visit sought to give impetus to China's agenda of 'Asian security' and establishing a 'community with a shared future the new era'. It also projected China's confidence and Chinese President Xi Jinping's determination to push ahead with his ambition of making China the dominant power in Asia and surpassing the US by 2049, notwithstanding the tariffs and restrictive measures imposed by US President Trump to contain China.

US President Trump's focus on rebalancing trade relationships, has created fissures between the US and its closest partners Canada and Europe, and undermined the confidence of US Treaty allies in the Indo-Pacific and elsewhere in Washington's ability -- or willingness -- to live up to its Security Treaty commitments in the event of confrontation with China. The diplomatic manoeuvrings of Japan, South Korea and Vietnam vis-a-vis China in recent months reflect their doubts about the US. These doubts pervade Taiwan and Europe too. Perceiving an opportunity and aiming to widen these differences, Xi Jinping's trip -- his first abroad this year -- sought to visibly strengthen existing diplomatic and economic ties with these countries and bind them closer in the face of the looming economic uncertainties.

Throughout his tour Xi Jinping asserted that China is a solid economic and security partner and wanted to work with its neighbours to forge a common destiny for mankind. To reinforce the message of mutual benefit through economic cooperation, Beijing ensured there were substantial outcomes during the visit. China and Vietnam signed 45 agreements focusing on supply chain cooperation. China and Malaysia concluded 31 agreements ranging from micro-level AI cooperation to macro-level global security frameworks. The China-Cambodia strategic relationship was further elevated through the "all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership," offering a model for other countries seeking closer ties with Beijing. It upgraded the versions outlined in 2019 and 2023. The latest 2025 iteration includes six strategic domains — politics, industrial capacity, agriculture, energy, security, and cultural exchange. These areas encompass cooperation on supply chains, artificial intelligence, development aid,

customs and sanitation, media, and military training, particularly regarding the Ream Naval Base.

Xi Jinping emphasised that the security and prosperity of China's neighbours is that of China too. During the Central Conference on Peripheral Diplomacy on April 9, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasised the strategic importance of “building a community with a shared future in the neighbourhood” and called for new progress in China’s neighbourhood diplomacy. He stressed that China, “being vast and sharing long borders with many countries, must view its periphery as a foundation for development and prosperity, a core area for national security, a priority arena for diplomacy, and a key platform for advancing a global community with a shared future.” The People's Daily (April 21) disclosed that "The Central Conference on Neighbouring Work proposed for the first time an Asian security model of sharing danger and security, seeking common ground while reserving differences, and dialogue and consultation. Based on the practice of China and its neighbouring countries in jointly protecting security, it enriched the concept of Asian security and provided innovative ideas for Asian countries to achieve common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security". The formulation is more inclusive than the resolutions of the first conference on peripheral diplomacy in 2013, which, for the first time in the history of the People’s Republic of China, categorised countries as ‘friends’ and offered then vast quantities of financial assistance and security relationships. Those not designated as ‘friends’, it said, would be subject to protracted periods of sustained pressure.

Xi Jinping's focus on Asia was definite and inescapable. He pointedly and vigorously promoted the doctrine that “Asian affairs should be handled by Asians.” This rhetoric, together with the overtures to the “Global South” and “South-South cooperation,” are aimed at forging a “neighbourhood community” partial to China and capable of countering Trump’s tariffs and U.S.-led Indo-Pacific strategies aimed at containing China. Writing in the People’s Daily (April 21) Wang Fan, President of the China Foreign Affairs University, sought to assure that China will maintain the continuity and stability of its diplomatic policy in the surrounding areas, work with neighbouring countries to strengthen friendly cooperation, and create a new future for Asia. Subsequent to the Central Conference on Peripheral (Neighbourhood) Diplomacy, there have been a number of articles in China's official media on good ties, peace and stability being essential to China's security.

Xi Jinping also presented his vision of the new global world order. The Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative -- contributions of “Chinese wisdom” -- were highlighted as the underlying principles of the new global world order. At the 19th Party Congress in 2017, Xi Jinping had asserted that by 2049, China would be in a position to influence, or create, international institutions. Xi Jinping has also articulated that the world order needs to be more fair and equitable. The joint statement issued after Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin's Summit in 2020, reiterated these views indicating their joint aspiration. With Trump initiating his policies promptly on commencing his second term, China though embattled and suffering serious economic difficulties, sees the current uncertainties created by Trump's policies as an opportunity for China to strengthen its position.

The state-owned CCTV (April 21) telecast a report under the caption “Work together to implement the global security initiative and jointly safeguard world peace and stability”. It claimed that during his state visits Xi Jinping “intensively, profoundly expounded the concept and policy of good neighbourliness, neighbourly security, neighbourly prosperity, amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness, and shared destiny, promoted the achievement of hundreds of cooperation results, wrote a new chapter in the construction of a community with a shared future for neighbouring countries, and outlined a new picture of China and neighbouring countries jointly promoting stability and prosperity”. CCTV added that “The Global Security Initiative is an international public product that China provides to the world in the new era. Together with the Global Development Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, it provides strategic guidance for building a community with a shared future for mankind”. This is perhaps the first time China has described the Global Security Initiative as “an international public product that China provides to the world in the new era” and together with the Global Development Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative as providing “strategic guidance for building a community with a shared future for mankind”. This suggests these principles underpin Xi Jinping’s concept of the new world order.

On arrival at Noi Bai International Airport in Hanoi on his fourth visit to Vietnam, Xi Jinping was welcomed on April 14 by Vietnamese Party and government leaders and local representatives. They included Luong Cuong, member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) Central Committee and Executive Secretary of the Central Secretariat, Tran Kim Hsiu, Secretary of the CPV Central Secretariat, and Director of the CC General Office of the Central Committee, Le Hoai Trung. Xi Jinping issued a written statement saying China is pleased to see that “living standards in Vietnam have steadily improved, Vietnam’s global and regional influence has continued to grow, and the country has made notable progress in advancing its socialist industrialization and modernization drive”. He “expressed his belief that under the strong leadership of the CPV Central Committee led by To Lam, Vietnam will surely pursue the socialist path suited to its national conditions and fulfil the tasks set forth by the 13th National Congress of the CPV” and “continue to break new ground for the development of its Party and the country”.

Coinciding with Xi Jinping’s arrival Vietnam’s leading newspaper Nhan Dan published a lengthy signed article by Chinese President Xi Jinping on April 14. The article was titled: ‘Building on past achievements and making new advances in pursuit of shared goals’. Xi Jinping said “China and Vietnam are friendly socialist neighbours sharing the same ideals and extensive strategic interests. The profound friendship between the two parties and two peoples, forged decades ago, has grown stronger as we explore a socialist path suited to our respective national conditions and advance our respective modernization drive. Building the China-Vietnam community with a shared future that carries strategic significance serves the common interests of our two countries and is conducive to peace, stability, development and prosperity in our region and beyond. It conforms with the trend of history. And it is the choice by our peoples”.

The article traced the historical revolutionary ties between the two countries and highlighted their economic ties. Asserting that China and Vietnam have pursued closer cooperation on industrial and supply chains amid a sluggish global economic recovery, it noted that China has been Vietnam’s biggest trading partner for over 20 years in a row, with total bilateral trade

exceeding 260 billion USD in 2024. It emphasised that despite “the headwinds of mounting unilateralism and protectionism, the Chinese economy expanded by five percent in 2024, contributing around 30 percent to the global economy” and assured that “China will ensure continuity and stability of its neighbourhood diplomacy” and “will stay committed to the principle of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness”. Xi Jinping said “We should properly manage differences and safeguard peace and stability in our region”, adding “The successful delimitation of our boundaries on land and in the Beibu Gulf demonstrates that with vision, we are fully capable of properly settling maritime issues through consultation and negotiation”.

Xi Jinping was accompanied on the visit by Chinese Politburo Standing Committee member and Director of the CCP CC General Office Cai Qi, Politburo member and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, State Councillor and Public Security Minister Wang Xiaohong among others and they were present at the talks. Also present in Xi Jinping’s entourage was Zhou Yu, a female senior translator of China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs who has accompanied Xi Jinping on many visits. She graduated from Wuhan Foreign Studies University in 1995 and was later admitted to the English Department of Beijing Foreign Studies University. In 1999, she passed the special diplomatic examination and became a translator of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Briefing the media after the 3-nation tour, Chinese Politburo member and Foreign Minister Wang Yi noted the close ties between the two “socialist” countries. He pointed to the presence of high-ranking officials at the airport to welcome and see off Xi Jinping and the presence of the CPV’s entire Politburo at the banquet hosted jointly by the CPV General Secretary To Lam and Vietnam President Laong Cuong. Wang Yi noted that this year is also the “China-Vietnam Cultural Exchange Year”. He said the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two will be “promoted to a higher and deeper level” and pointed to the number of agreements signed. He emphasised that “As two socialist countries in the world where the Communist Party has been in power for a long time and has made great achievements, building a community with a shared future for China and Vietnam has important international significance”.

Chinese President Xi Jinping was in Malaysia on April 16-17. The Malaysian government provided intense security for Xi Jinping’s visit. Prior to his visit, China’s Ambassador to Malaysia Ouyang Yujing published an article in People’s Daily on April 14 titled ‘Advancing the building of the China-Malaysia community with a shared future to new heights’. He said Xi Jinping’s visit to Malaysia, which comes almost 12 years after his previous visit, marks a major milestone in China-Malaysia relations. During his visit Xi Jinping held talks with King Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar and Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim on promoting bilateral ties and regional cooperation. He said “China is ready to work with the Malaysian side to build a high-level strategic China-Malaysia community with a shared future, so as to usher in a new “Golden 50 Years” for bilateral ties.”

Several universities signed very detailed cooperation agreements during the visit. Peking University signed an agreement with the University of Malaya on cooperation in AI and materials. The leaders of the two countries agreed to deepen the alignment of development strategies, promote the East Coast Railway, the “Two Countries, Two Parks” and other “Belt

and Road" flagship projects, and build Malaysia's important ports into important hubs of the "New Land-Sea Corridor". China and Malaysia also signed 26 cooperation documents.

China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian said (April 17) that China and Malaysia have a long history of friendship, and the two countries have similar ideas, shared interests, and people-to-people bonds. During President Xi Jinping's state visit to Malaysia, the two governments formally signed the Agreement on Mutual Exemption of Visas for Holders of Official Ordinary Passports and Ordinary Passports. Lin Jian said this will surely further promote bilateral personnel exchanges and exchanges and cooperation in various fields, and push the building of a China-Malaysia community with a shared future to a new level. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi separately observed in his briefing on the visits that Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar had emphasized that only by "working together can Malaysia and China move forward steadily and Malaysia will always be a steadfast and principled friend of China. The friendship between Malaysia and China will last forever, as deep as the sea, as eternal as the stars, and always vigorous and full of hope".

Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Pnomh Penh on April 17, on the third and last leg of his three-nation Southeast Asia tour by special plane where, according to CCTV (April 17), he was given a "grand welcome" at the airport. He was received at the airport by King Norodom Sihamoni, Prince Chakrapong, Princess Arun and other members of the royal family, People's Party Chairman and Senate Chairman Hun Sen, First Vice Chairman of the National Assembly Qian Ye, and five deputy prime ministers including Kuo Sopha, Prak Sokhonn, Han Chunnalo, Sao Sokha and Hun Many. Guards of honour lined both sides of the red carpet. Princess Jenna of the Cambodian royal family presented Xi Jinping with a jasmine bracelet, and young women threw petals on the red carpet along the way.

In a written statement issued upon arrival on April 17, Xi Jinping said that China-Cambodia relations have withstood the test of global transformations and always remained rock-solid. He noted that bilateral ties were forged and nurtured by the elder generation of leaders of the two countries. He later attended a welcome ceremony hosted by Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni and also separately met Cambodian Queen Mother Norodom Monineath, held talks with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and met Cambodian People's Party Chairman and Senate Chairman Hun Sen. On April 17 afternoon Chinese President Xi Jinping was awarded the "Grand Collar of the Order of National Independence of the Kingdom of Cambodia" by King Norodom Sihamoni at the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh.

Xinhua (April 17) reported that ahead of Xi Jinping's arrival the Cambodian media outlets Khmer Times, Jian Hua Daily and Fresh News published a signed article by Xi Jinping captioned 'Together We Strive, Together We Thrive: Toward a Stable and Sustainable China-Cambodia Community with a Shared Future in the New Era'. Recalling the "historic legacy of good-neighborly relations", it asserting that "Our community with a shared future is defined by our mutual commitment to friendship and righteousness". It added that "For many years, China has been Cambodia's largest trading partner and largest source of investment, and our industrial and supply chain cooperation has continued to deepen".

Xi Jinping urged "Let us bring our mutual political trust to a higher level" and asserted that "China firmly supports Cambodia in independently choosing a development path that suits its

own conditions, in safeguarding its national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and in playing a greater role on the international stage. To jointly safeguard our political security, we should strengthen communication on matters of strategic importance such as foreign policy and national defense, and resolutely oppose any attempts by external forces to interfere in our internal affairs, sow discord or undermine China-Cambodia friendship". Referring to security cooperation, Xi Jinping said "we should strengthen exchange and cooperation in combating external interference and separatist activities. We must guard against and resist "color revolutions," strengthen joint exercises and training, emergency management and security cooperation on major Belt and Road projects, and crack down on telecom and cyber fraud and other criminal activities. We must stay committed to the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, build consensus on security concepts and approaches, and jointly promote peace and tranquility in the region and the world at large". The article included at least four references to "China-Cambodia community with a shared future in the new era".

Commenting on the visit to Cambodia, Beijing Daily (April 18) pointed out that Chinese President Xi Jinping had said 'The two sides should take the construction of an all-weather China-Cambodia community with a shared future in the new era as a new starting point'. He also mentioned the need to implement the new version of the China-Cambodia Community with a Shared Future Action Plan, deepen political mutual trust at a higher level and build a higher level of security guarantees. Xi Jinping called for vigorously promoting high-quality cooperation in jointly building the "Belt and Road". He said China encourages more Chinese companies to invest in Cambodia and import more high-quality Cambodian agricultural products, adding that China will continue to provide government scholarships to Cambodia, support the establishment of a China-Cambodia youth dialogue and exchange mechanism, encourage local governments, media, and think tanks to carry out more exchanges, and bring the people of the two countries closer.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet said that "Cambodia and China have long respected each other and treated each other as equals, and China is Cambodia's most reliable and trusted friend". He said Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit will deepen the political mutual trust between the two countries and "effectively promote the construction of an all-weather community of shared future between Cambodia and China in the new era". He believed that under the strong leadership of President Xi Jinping, China will achieve its second centenary goal as scheduled. He said 'China is Cambodia's largest trading partner and the largest source of investment. Cambodia is willing to strengthen cooperation with China in the fields of economy, trade, investment, industrial chain supply chain, agriculture, infrastructure construction'. After the talks, the two sides signed 37 agreements cooperation documents covering production and supply chain cooperation, artificial intelligence, development aid, customs inspection and quarantine, health and other fields. They also issued the "Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Cambodia on Building an All-Weather China-Cambodia Community with a Shared Future in the New Era and Implementing the Three Major Global Initiatives."

Chinese Foreign minister Wang Yi in his briefing after the tour, said "the highlight of this visit was the joint announcement by President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Hun Manet that China-Cambodia relations would be elevated to an all-weather China-Cambodia community

with a shared future in the new era”. He said “this is the first time that China has elevated bilateral relations with a Southeast Asian country to an all-weather level, and it is also the first all-weather community with a shared future in the new era built at the bilateral level”. He claimed that “The Asian security concept advocated by China, which advocates sharing weal and woe, seeking common ground while reserving differences, and dialogue and consultation, is increasingly becoming a consensus among countries in the region”. Accusing the United States of arbitrarily imposing tariffs, ignoring international rules, and pursuing hegemony, Wang Yi said “Southeast Asian countries are the first to bear the brunt, worrying about the prospects of the world economy and unwilling to see the law of the jungle return. At this critical moment, the world is eager for stability and a sense of direction, and neighboring countries expect China to demonstrate leadership and provide certainty”.

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