

BRI Beautiful Village Forum

Theme: “Building a Beautiful Village by Holding Hands with BRI”

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Chairman of the World Tourism Alliance,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would first like to congratulate the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Affairs and the Governments of Gansu Province, Longnan City and Kang County for organizing the BRI Beautiful Village Forum.

It is an honour for me to attend this Forum at the beautiful and historic city of Longnan, famous for its eco-tourism, and learn about its impressive endeavors for rural revitalization.

The Forum has given us the opportunity to come together and benefit from collective wisdom. As a Chinese proverb says “The ocean is vast because it rejects no rivers”. I am confident that this Forum would enlighten us with new ideas for transformation of our villages and the prosperity and progress of our peoples.

Distinguished Guests,

Villages are the birthplace of civilization. In ancient times, it was in the villages that humanity’s tryst with the destiny began. In the hamlets and villages of river valley civilizations like the Yellow River, Yangtze, Nile, Euphrates, Tigris and Pakistan’s Indus, humanity started its odyssey culminating in the present era’s Digital Age.

But human progress unfortunately has not been without cost. Today, we confront the challenges of massive urbanization, inequality and environmental degradation imperiling prospects of future growth.

We need to take a pause, review our progress, reassess our priorities and return to our villages for a new kind of development strategy.

For numerous problems we face today, our villages whisper their solutions to us!

My dear Friends,

Rural development is indispensable for national growth and development. In the past few decades, we were beholden to many development theories which prioritized

urban development on the premise that economic growth in cities would create space for rural development too. However, these urban-biased policies could not meet the desired results and led to grinding poverty in the villages.

We also lost focus on modernizing agriculture sector. A key to rural development. This led to low productivity, poor rural infrastructure, digital exclusion and meagre access to financial markets. These factors disempower and discourage our rural youths and trigger waves upon waves of migration to big cities, thus further complicating the governance task.

Distinguished Guests,

The future of rural world rests on the future of agriculture. Agriculture must move away from being a social sector for managing poverty to a business for wealth creation in the villages.

The Digital Revolution has opened new vistas in this regard. Many countries, most notably China, have focused on rural digitalization with phenomenal success. Its importance was further reinforced after the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic when physical business practices were greatly disrupted.

The digital economy is turning farming into a scientific enterprise. It is helping unprivileged farming communities for defeating poverty and bridging the income gap between the villages and cities. By digitally linking farms with markets, farmers can now sale their produce online, save precious time and labour, and earn profits.

In the realm of agriculture modernization, we are seeing the emergence of new trends with powerful tools and knowledge. Under intelligent farming system, the underground sensors can collect humidity and temperature data and relay the information to farmer's cellular phone to monitor the performance of their crops. The drones could now be used to spray pesticides and regularly monitor variation in temperature and humidity.

Dear Friends,

Besides agriculture modernization, tourism industry has emerged as the major stimulus for rural development, providing jobs and supporting rural businesses.

President Xi had once stated that “Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets”. In our rural areas these assets abound. We need to preserve them along with local customs and heritage to create “beautiful villages”.

Youth in rural communities are more likely to be unemployed than the adults. Without work, young people are forced to migrate to cities which strains social landscape of cities and irreversibly **damage rural communities**. As the towns and villages perish, local customs and heritage decay.

UN World Tourism Organisation has designated 2020 as the **Year of Tourism and Rural Development**. It brought forward the wealth of ideas to promote the potential of **tourism to create jobs for our rural communities**. This would help in advancing inclusion, preservation and promotion of natural and cultural heritage, and curbing urban migration.

Dear Friends,

China's peaceful rise and its economic achievements are indebted to a remarkable feat of development and prosperity with no precedent in the annals of history. In particular, bringing out 800 million people from the web of poverty is a success story and an enduring service to humanity.

In this journey China's main focus has been to upgrade and develop its rural areas. Along with the deepening of the rural reform, the poverty alleviation and development in rural China have witnessed its shift from a relief-oriented to a development-oriented strategy.

Chinese success in rural development is worth emulating for developing countries like Pakistan which are striving for national development and socio-economic progress. It has inspired us with a new hope that poverty is not ordained in man's destiny and that it can be uprooted by dispassionate, concerted and sustainable efforts. As President Xi said "constant dripping of water wears away the stone".

Distinguished Guests,

Pakistan has been endowed with fertile land, abundant water resources and four seasons allowing us to grow a variety of crops all around the year. In the fertile lands of Indus Valley Civilisation of Pakistan, the agriculture has been practiced since 10,000 B.C. The crops producing regions of modern Pakistan were once the granary of the entire subcontinent.

Agriculture contributes 18% to our GDP and provides employment for 38% of our total labour force. Pakistan is among the top producers of wheat, cotton, sugarcane, rice and variety of fruits. We have one of the world's largest resources of livestock which offers great potential for future growth. Major industries of Pakistan like textile and sugar are also dependent upon country's agriculture sector and its steady growth.

Dear Friends,

As the flagship project of President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative, CPEC occupies a pivotal position in the development agenda of Pakistan. After the success of its first phase, both sides have mutually agreed that Phase-II of CPEC would focus on socio-economic development, poverty alleviation and modernisation of agriculture for revitalisation of our rural economy.

During the visit of President Arif Alvi to Beijing in March this year, Pakistan and China concluded an MoU to establish a Joint Working Group on Agriculture. We look forward to win-win cooperation with China for enhancing yield of major crops, value addition to agricultural products and attracting foreign investment in agriculture sector of Pakistan. China's technical and material support to Pakistan for fighting the locusts attack has already set the stage for deepening our bilateral ties in this field.

We are confident that with the support of Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of China and encouraged by our past experiences of successful cooperation, we can turn a new page in agriculture modernisation for shared benefit.

Dear Friends,

Nature has blessed our world with great potential and promise. Perhaps, the most captivating gift of nature is beauty, and villages, like the beautiful Kang County, are the best repository of this pure and pristine treasure.

The still and serene beauty of a distant village is the finest balm to soothe our nerves and make a spiritual connection with the Ultimate Reality.

Lets us join hands and make efforts to enhance the beauty of our villages and its dwellers.

We owe this to nature, and to our future generations!

Thank You All !