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Interview

H.E. Mr. Yang Honglin

The Chinese Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Your Excellency Could you kindly comment on the current Sino-Saudi relations especially those mutually beneficiary cooperation in the areas of trade, culture, education and scientific research?

Over the past 19 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Saudi Arabia, Sino-Saudi relations have experienced rapid development. We have seen now frequent high-level exchange of visits and deepening political trust between the two countries. In 2006, the two heads of state conducted exchange of visits successfully within 3 months. In 2008, the Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping visited Saudi Arabia. And this February, President Hu Jintao visited Saudi Arabia again with numerous achievements, which had been injecting strong impetus to the further development of Sino-Saudi relations.

The economic and trade cooperation has witnessed vibrant progress. Bilateral trading volumes reached 41.8 billion US dollars last year. Saudi Arabia has ranked as the largest trading partner of China in the region of West Asia and Africa for 8 consecutive years. Both sides are endeavored to expand continuously the scale of cooperation in the fields of energy, infrastructure construction and investment on the basis of equality and win-win situation.

Cultural exchanges have been intensified. The two countries signed Cooperative Agreement in Culture and

Education in 2002. In 2005, the Chinese Culture Week was convened in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Ministry of Information and Culture hosted an event of publicizing traditional art, culture and folk legacy of Saudi Arabia during the Beijing Olympics in 2008. Meanwhile, the Chinese government dispatched high-level delegations to attend the Interfaith Dialogue Conference in Madrid and the UN High-Level Plenary Session on Culture of Peace in New York both initiated by King Abdullah. Those events played a very constructive role in strengthening mutual understanding and bringing the two peoples much closer.

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Educational cooperation has achieved considerable progress. With full support from the Chinese government, King Abdullah Scholarship Program chose China as one of the five destination countries in Asia for its applicants. The total number of students studying in China under this program had reached 147 by the end of 2007. The Saudi government also dispatched delegation to attend the China-Arab Forum on Higher Education Cooperation

in Yangzhou last year.

Scientific cooperation is booming. The Gene Institute of the Chinese Science Academy is working closely with its Saudi counterpart on improving the gene of Saudi date. We have also witnessed strengthening cooperation in bio-chemistry, Nami- technology, meteorology, precision instrument and other advanced areas of science and technology.

What are the priorities of Sino-Saudi relations?

The two heads of state endorsed the Sino-Saudi relation as strategic friendship with comprehensive coverage and long-term planning. This friendship comprises a wide range of areas including politics, economics, culture, education, sports, information, science and technology. The two sides now are endeavored to make concerted efforts in promoting the strategic friendship to a new height in every respect.

Could you brief us on the current situation of those Chinese companies operating in Saudi Arabia?

The Saudi economy has now encountered severe challenges affected by the world financial crisis. However, the Saudi government has spared no efforts in expanding investment towards those big infrastructure projects given by the consecutive accumulation of petrodollars over the past several years. It was of special significance of the signing of the Sino-Saudi Cooperative Agreement on Infrastructure Construction, which brought substantial opportunities for those Chinese companies planning to enter into the Saudi market. By the end of March 2009, 66 Chinese companies had accomplished registration proceedings of Saudi Arabia in the area of infrastructure cooperation with 110 projects amounting 10 billion US dollars under construction. The total amount of

employees has reached 21.8 thousand, among that 16 thousand workers are Chinese.

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What will be the most targeted sectors in the next future for Chinese Investors in GCC Countries? How do you comment on the prospects of those Chinese companies in Saudi Arabia?

GCC countries enjoy large comparative advantages in the energy sector with abundant reserves and mature industrial policies. The Chinese government attaches great importance to the mutual cooperation with GCC countries in this regard and encourages relevant Chinese companies to expand investment in natural gas prospecting, petrochemical industry and other energy sectors in GCC countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefits. Meanwhile, GCC countries have achieved considerable progress in the areas of finance, education, culture, public health, science and technology, which has been attracting attentions of numerous Chinese investors with insight.

The Chinese companies as a whole embrace very broad prospects of investing in Saudi Arabia getting along with the ever-deepening political trust and economic interdependence. The Saudi government has also been doing its full means in improving domestic environment and simplifying proceedings for investment. It is of special significance for both China and Saudi Arabia, to deepen investment cooperation, integrate mutual advantages and overcome current hardships brought by the world financial crisis.