



## Meloni's visit likely to 'clear misunderstanding'

The first visit since Italy's withdrawal from the BRI is likely aimed at making up for the regret of withdrawal and clarifying misunderstandings, said experts **3**

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# SCS disputes won't override ASEAN's main course: analysts

# Chinese FM arrives in Laos with cooperation in mind

By Zhang Han

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Thursday arrived in Lao capital Vientiane to attend the ASEAN meetings and other events against the backdrop of turbulence in the South China Sea, but analysts believed the

tensions will not have a major impact on the main course of cooperation.

The Philippines hopes to utilize the ASEAN events to endorse its stance, but other ASEAN members understand the complexity and sensitivity of the topic, and recognize the

bloc's priority as being development and prosperity, they said.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, met with general secretary of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee and Lao

President Thongloun Sisoulith in Vientiane on Thursday.

China appreciates that Laos has always stood with China on issues concerning China's core interests and major concerns, and will continue to be the most reliable friend and



## Netanyahu's US trip a 'bet on both sides'

By Yang Sheng

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to the US is an attempt to show his supporters that Washington is still with him, and he is using this chance to "bet on both sides" as he is scheduled to meet with US President Joe Biden and likely Democratic nominee Vice President Kamala Harris, as well as former president Donald Trump, so that he can ensure that whoever eventually wins the election, the US will still back Israel despite its operation in Gaza already killing nearly 40,000 Palestinian people.

Analysts said that Trump is now taking advantage after Democrats just changed their candidate, which may be a favorable development to Netanyahu, as Trump will be even more tolerant of Israel's operation in Gaza. However, Netanyahu's call to build a "Middle East NATO" is unlikely to happen as Iran and Arab countries have fixed their ties and the reconciliation trend in the region is irreversible.

### Purpose of visit

During his address to the US Congress, Netanyahu lashed out at protests against Israel's ongoing war in Gaza, broadly disparaging anti-Israel protesters as "Iran's useful idiots," CNN reported on Wednesday.

The Israeli prime minister's nearly hour-long address to Congress struck a bellicose tone as he vowed to "fight until we achieve victory." Netanyahu falsely downplayed and deflected on the role of Israel in causing the ongoing civilian strife in Gaza. Although he made some reference to efforts to bring the hostages



## Flagbearer for Paris 2024 opening



China's legendary table tennis player Ma Long speaks to the media at the Olympic Village, Paris on July 25, 2024. Ma, who has claimed three team golds and two singles titles in previous Olympic Games, will carry China's flag at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games opening ceremony on Friday evening local time, along with artistic swimmer Feng Yu. (See story on Page 16) Photo: cnsphoto

# China-ASEAN ties 'resilient to intervention'

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partner of Laos, ready to enhance experience sharing with Laos on governance, Wang said.

In his meeting with Lao Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone on Thursday, Wang said both sides should carry forward traditional friendship, deepen construction of a China-Laos community with a shared future, and achieve high-standard, high-quality and high-level collaboration and coordination, making their relationship one of the best among China's neighboring countries.

From Thursday to Saturday, Wang will attend the ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the ASEAN Plus Three Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the ASEAN Regional Forum Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane and pay an official visit to Laos, according to Chinese Foreign Ministry.

The ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting convened on Thursday, to be followed by meetings with East Asian countries and other global players including Russia, the US and the EU.

## Cooperation priorities

Ge Hongliang, vice dean of the ASE-

AN College at the Guangxi Minzu University, told the Global Times that the foreign ministers' meetings, routinely held annually, will prepare for the leaders' meeting in the second half of the year and serve as an opportunity to review the progress and specify further plans to jointly build a peaceful, safe and secure, prosperous, beautiful and amicable homeland.

Ge named infrastructure, economic growth, the South China Sea and external hotspot issues as areas in which China and ASEAN will have in-depth exchanges.

ASEAN's choice of main theme suggested that the bloc has an urgent need to boost its economy, and improving infrastructure, particularly transportation and energy, is a key task as it has prevented economic development from going faster, Ge said.

Despite a better economic performance than a few years ago, many Southeast Asian economies still face pressure from inflation and fiscal budgets, and are compelled to stabilize industrial chain and build up economic resilience in the era of Industry 4.0, which demands close cooperation with China, Ge said.

The expert also mentioned some

non-regional hot spot issues that would impact the international environment, namely the Russia-Ukraine crisis and the war in Gaza, which China and the ASEAN members have similar stances on.

## Not a confrontational sea

The South China Sea will definitely be an integral part of China-ASEAN exchanges, and the situation this year is more complex, given frictions between China and the Philippines under the shadow of US intervention, analysts said.

ASEAN will likely welcome the "provisional arrangement" reached between Beijing and Manila at the Ren'ai Jiao, or Ren'ai Reef concerning the illegally grounded Philippine warship, and negotiations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) will continue to make some progress, Ge said.

Ding Duo, deputy director of the Institute of Maritime Law and Policy at China's National Institute for South China Sea Studies, believed ASEAN will not allow a confrontational atmosphere to override the platform's basic position of disputes over the South China Sea being addressed directly by the countries involved, and ASEAN should join hands

with China to safeguard peace and stability.

Manila hopes to utilize the ASEAN events to endorse its claims, but other ASEAN members are aware that disputes are not solely between China and the Philippines – some countries have a row with Manila that is no less serious than that between Beijing and Manila, Ding explained.

They understand Manila's attempts to take advantage of them, and that the US is standing behind it, so they are cautious of echoing Philippines' views amid the frictions, Ding said.

Although some analysts believe the US will try to sow discord between China and ASEAN, and mobilize the Philippines to create trouble, both Ding and Ge are optimistic that ASEAN can uphold centrality and resist the intervention and negative impact of external forces.

ASEAN does not want to focus excessively on South China Sea and marginalize the key agenda of regional cooperation, solidarity and ASEAN's international status, or divert the main course of the China-ASEAN relationship, Ding said, "the stability and resilience of the relationship determines that it can withstand the test."

# 'Middle East NATO' very unlikely, as reconciliation process irreversible: expert

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home, significantly more of the speech focused on the ongoing war and took aim at his foes – Iran, the International Criminal Court and protesters, said the CNN.

Liu Zhongmin, a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, told the Global Times that since the outbreak of this round of the Palestine-Israel conflict, Israel has received widespread criticism worldwide and also pressure from the Biden administration for a cease-fire, but this time, Netanyahu is trying to use his visit to tell his people in Israel and the world that Washington is still with him, and that he is able to meet with Biden and Trump, and also may hope the US presidential election to come out with a favorable result for Israel.

According to AP, Netanyahu's popularity has plummeted at home, and the visit – at least originally – was seen as giving him a chance to show himself as a global statesman, welcomed by the lawmakers and leaders of Israel's closest ally and the world's only superpower.

However, the US has seen protests across the country on college campuses and elsewhere in opposition to Israel's war in Gaza. On the day of Ne-



**Washington Metropolitan Police clear demonstrators from blocking traffic on July 24, 2024, in Washington, ahead of a visit by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the US Capitol. Thousands of protesters against the war in Gaza converged on Washington on the day to protest against the visit, demanding Washington to stop military aid to Israel, media reported. Photo: VCG**

tanyahu's speech, there were protests both outside and inside the US Capitol complex.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson helped bring about Netanyahu's address to lawmakers, highlighting firm Republican support for the Israeli leader. Netanyahu has had tense relations with Biden despite the administration's military and diplomatic support for Israel's war, AP reported.

Experts said that Repub-

licans and Democrats held very different stances over the Israel-Palestine conflict. Although both parties continue to support Israel, Democrats are showing more sympathy for Palestine as they need to win support from immigrants and left-wing voters, while Republicans are much closer to Israel and almost unconditionally supporting its operation in Gaza regardless of how many Palestinian civilians get killed.

Biden and Netanyahu were expected to meet Thursday, while Trump agreed to a Friday meeting with the Israeli leader, the AP reported.

## Middle East NATO?

Apart from building ties with different forces in Washington, the Israeli prime minister is also trying to make US elites share his narrative shaping Iran as the biggest threat in the region.

Netanyahu has proposed the creation of a new military bloc modeled after NATO called the "Abraham Alliance," aimed at Iran, RT reported.

In a briefing with the Israeli press delegation after his congressional speech on Wednesday afternoon, Netanyahu compared such a cohort to a "NATO-style alliance."

Liu said Netanyahu's idea is unlikely to be realized, because at present, with the help and mediation of China, ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as other Arab countries, have already been fixed and re-established, and the reconciliation process among Muslim countries in the Middle East is irreversible, adding that Tehran is now ruled by moderate reformists that are less hostile to the West, so Netanyahu's attempt to spread fear over Iran among other regional countries won't succeed.

Nowadays, Arab countries are being more concerned about the Gaza crisis and due to Israel's tough stance and endless military actions, the crisis has now spilled over into other countries such as Lebanon and Yemen, so it's unthinkable that regional countries would be willing to join a military alliance with Israel, said Liu.

