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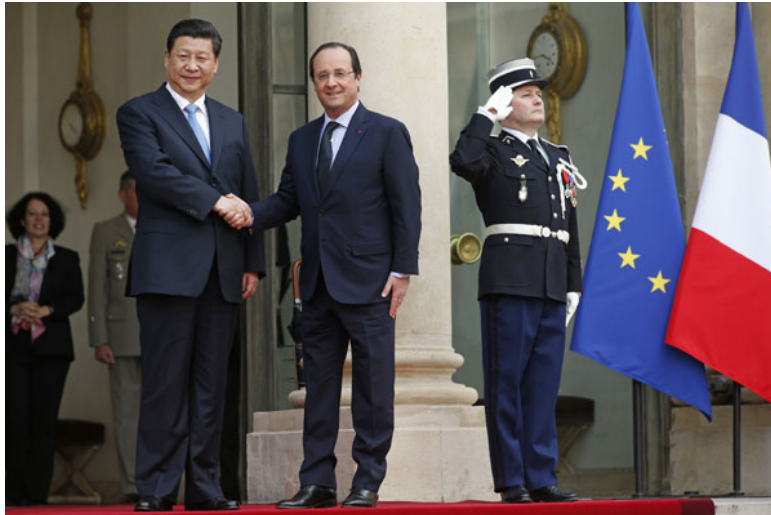
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Nations to build on 50 years of ties

By LI XIANG and WU JIAO in Paris and ZHOU WA in Beijing



President Xi Jinping meets his French counterpart Francois Hollande during a welcoming ceremony at the Elysee Palace in Paris on Wednesday. (Benoit Tessier / REUTERS)

Half a century after establishing full diplomatic relations, China and France are expected to "embrace yet another 50 years of proud success", President Xi Jinping said.

The Chinese leader made the comment in an article he wrote for the French newspaper Le Figaro, a day before he arrived in Paris to meet his French counterpart Francois Hollande on Wednesday.

"Our path of cooperation will yield even richer fruits, and China-France relations will embrace yet another 50 years of proud success," Xi wrote.

Leaders of the two countries oversaw the signing of a series of major business deals after their talks on Wednesday.

They are expected to join anniversary celebrations during Xi's three-day visit.

Cooperation agreements the two sides signed include nuclear energy, aviation, urbanization, agriculture and finance sectors.

Details were guarded closely by both sides, and no details had been announced by midnight on Wednesday.

A Reuters report said earlier the two leaders were set to witness the signing of two industrial cooperation deals — the business highlights from a meeting with a strong investment theme.

The report said Chinese carmaker Dongfeng is set to deepen ties with PSA Peugeot Citroen, buying a 14 percent stake as part of a recapitalization deal for the struggling French carmaker.

Airbus was set to agree the sale to China of at least 150 aircraft worth \$20 billion, and possibly as many as 200, in a deal that could include both planes and helicopters, the Reuters report said.

Xi is scheduled to visit the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on Thursday where he will meet with Director-General Irina Bokova and deliver a speech.

The visit to France will culminate in a concert at Versailles, as the two countries celebrate the 50th anniversary of full diplomatic ties.

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Before flying to Paris, Xi began what Agence France-Presse described as a nostalgia-tinged French trip with a 16-hour stop in Lyon. The eastern city is a former silk center that established enduring links with China from the 16th century.

"My visit to France comes at a particular moment, and will allow for work with President Francois Hollande and other French leaders to take stock of 50 years of Sino-French relations, and plan the future together," Xi said on arriving in Lyon on Tuesday evening.

Earlier in the day, he attended the conclusion of the Nuclear Security Summit in the Netherlands.

Xi visited biotechnology firm bioMerieux, which has a strong presence in China.

He said China and France have undertaken frequent exchanges, and share "broad prospects" in boosting cooperation in the health sector.

Beijing is promoting reforms in the public health sector, and improving the health services system is considered one of the government's priorities.

Academics in Paris and Beijing approached by China Daily expect closer rapport and wider cooperation between the two countries.

Daniel Kahn, president of French law firm Kahn & Associates in Paris, said, "I expect to hear a clear commitment from both countries to continue to develop and strengthen the relationship in a number of sectors."

He said such sectors include, but are not limited to, food and agro business — where France should become the main partner of China — aeronautics, automotives, health and pharmaceuticals, technology, and environmental monitoring.

Zhang Jinling, a researcher of French studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that while economic cooperation is important, the two countries should not ignore people-to-people exchanges.

"Favorable ties depend on frequent exchanges in all fields. China and France should attach more importance to people-to-people exchanges to have a solid foundation of friendship in the younger generation between the two countries," Zhang said.

Jia Xiudong, a senior research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies, said the 50th anniversary offers a good opportunity for Beijing and Paris to improve their political, economic and cultural ties and cooperation in various fields.

"It is a good opportunity for both countries to draw lessons from the past and set the tone for the future," Jia said.

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