

China denounces South China Sea verdict, claims right to air-defence zone

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Beijing: China today once again brushed aside the UN tribunal verdict on the disputed South China Sea saying that it should be "dumped into garbage".

Defence Minister General Chang Wanquan said China will not accept any proposition or action based on the decision by the arbitral tribunal and that it has the right to declare a unilateral air-defence zone over the strategic South China Sea.

"China's territorial sovereignty and maritime interests in the South China Sea will not be affected by the ruling under any circumstances," Chang said here.

China has refused to abide by the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) tribunal in The Hague. It has said the Philippines' claim over parts of the SCS is groundless from the perspectives of either history or international law.Â

"The Chinese navy can operate in South China Sea at any time as the area belongs to China. Certain country has sent aircraft carrier fleet to the South China Sea," Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin said.

"We do not recognise or implement the award. We hope it is only a white paper and it will not be enforced. Just dump it into garbage or put it in a shelf or put it in archives and let us come back to the track of negotiations," he said.

He said that China hopes to go back to the negotiating table with the Philippines.Â

"This is the policy of the Chinese government and hope that neighbouring countries in the South China Sea and ASEAN countries jointly uphold peace and stability of the South China Sea and freedom of navigation and over flights," he told reporters.

As to whether China will set up an Air Defence Identification Zone over the SCS to force aircraft flying in the area to seek permissions from Beijing, the assistant foreign minister said China "has the right to do so."

"We have set up one over the East China Sea (close to Japan) and whether we will set up another in South China Sea will depend on the degree of threat we are facing. If threatened enough, we will do so but it will depend on a host of factors," Liu said at the nationally televised conference.

"Do not make it a region of war," he warned.

- With PTI Inputs