

Can't lose one centimetre of disputed area in South China Sea: Beijing

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Beijing: Hardening its position on South China Sea dispute, China today said that the country can't lose one centimetre of the area that it claims.

Yang Jiechi

Top Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi said that the issue of sovereignty was the nation's "bottom line".

"Though China is large, we cannot lose one centimetre of inheritance left by the ancestors," said Yang who is the State Councillor, a rank higher than Foreign Minister, while commenting on the ongoing row over the verdict delivered by an international arbitral tribunal which quashed Beijing's claims of historic rights over the South China Sea.

Yang's comments also carry significance for India as he is China's designated Special Representative for boundary talks along with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval.

India and China have so far held 19 rounds of talks to resolve the boundary dispute. At the centre of the dispute is China's claims over Arunachal Pradesh which it regards as part of southern Tibet.

China regards the boundary issue as a legacy from history and refuses to recognise the McMahon Line as the effective boundary between the two countries.

While both sides in recent years managed to reduce tensions between troops patrolling disputed areas with various dialogue mechanisms, China has not responded positively to India's proposal to demarcate the 3,488-km Line of Actual Control (LAC) to avoid border tensions.

China is currently mustering all its resources to counter the South China Sea judgement by a five-member global tribunal appointed by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) which has struck down its "nine-dash line" claim on almost all of the South China Sea that was based on its arguments that the islands and reefs were discovered and administered by the Chinese for over 2,000 years.

The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei counter China's claims in the resource-rich waterway as it falls in their own Exclusive Economic Zones.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang warned yesterday saying that "if anyone wants to take any provocative action against China's security interest based on the award, China will take a decisive response".

China has also lodged a diplomatic protest with Australia after its Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said the South China Sea verdict is legally binding and Australian ships and aircraft would continue to exercise freedom of navigation and overflight rights over the area.

"We will take decisive measures in response to any provocative action attempting to harm China's sovereignty and security interests under the pretext of freedom of navigation," Lu said.

- (With PTI inputs)