

China, Pakistan launch first joint patrol on PoK-Xinjiang border

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Beijing: In clinching evidence of the growing bonhomie between Pakistan and China, the border troops of two countries have launched joint patrolling of the border connecting PoK with Xinjiang province, first time in the history.

The joint patrolling came amid the reports that over 100 Uighurs have fled China's Xinjiang province to join ISIS.

Chinese state media reported about the joint patrol even as Chinese President Xi Jinping asked the Chinese Muslims to practice their religion 'as part of Chinese society and direction'.

The People's Daily Online on Thursday published a dozen photos with a caption "the frontier defence regiment of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Xinjiang, along with a border police force from Pakistan, carry out a joint patrol along the China-Pakistan border".

The photos show teams of armed troops from both sides conducting foot patrols in a number of areas.

This is the first time China-Pakistan began joint patrols in recent years though Chinese troops have been conducting patrols in the area since 2014.

The move also holds significance for India because the tension between India and Pakistan has been rising in the aftermath of killing of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burahn Wani.

Though there is no write-up to provide details of the joint patrolling and what prompted both the countries to launch it, it coincides with reports of over 100 Uyghur Muslims sneaking out of Xinjiang to join ISIS.

US think-tank New America Foundation on Wednesday said tough religious restrictions on Muslim minorities in China's far west may have driven 114 Uighurs to join the ISIS but found that the recruits had no prior experience with jihad, raising questions about China's official narrative of radicalisation in Xinjiang by the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM).

Uighurs are a predominantly Muslim Turkic-speaking ethnic group who hail from Xinjiang and China in the past has stated that a number of militants from the community who fought in Syria were caught after their return to cause violent attacks in the volatile province, which bore the brunt of the militancy reportedly carried out by the ETIM.

The New America Foundation in its report said banning and or strictly controlled the observance of certain Muslim practices, such as growing beards and fasting during Ramadan has led many to join the ISIS.

The separatist militant group ETIM in the past is reported to have training bases in Pakistan's tribal areas and subsequently, Pakistan military under pressure from China carried out massive air and ground operations to clear the Uyghur militants' bases.

Currently, the work is underway for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which connects both the countries through highways, rail, optic cable network and pipelines. Once the \$46 billion project is complete, Xinjiang will get linked to Pakistan's Gwadar port.

Meanwhile, state-run China Daily today reported that Xi on a visit to Ningxia Hui autonomous region, the home for Hui

Muslims, asked Chinese Muslims to practice their religion as part of Chinese society and direction, and resist illegal religious infiltration and carry forward the patriotic tradition.

"Religions in our country, the endemic ones and those from abroad, have become deeply embedded in the Chinese civilisation, whose history covers more than 5,000 years," he said while visiting a mosque in Yinchuan, the capital of Ningxia.

"They (religions) will continue to flourish only by taking root here," he said.

More than 2.4 million Muslims live in Ningxia, a region that boasts of more than 5,000 religious sites, nearly 4,391 of them Islamic, the report said.

- (With PTI inputs)