

China confirms developing next-gen long-range bomber

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Beijing: The head of the Chinese Air Force has confirmed reports that the country is working on a next-generation strategic bomber to boost airforce's long-range capability.

The development comes as Beijing was eyeing new firepower to replace its Soviet-era aircraft.

General Ma Xiaotian, People's Liberation Army Air Force chief, said the new bomber would enhance China's long-range strike capability "with even greater strides to come." "We are now developing a next generation, long-range strike bomber that you will see sometime in the future," he told reporters in Changchun, Jilin province, at a PLA Air Force open day, official media reported.

The PLAAF commander's remarks publicly confirm for the first time that China has been working on a long-range bomber project. Ma's confirmation puts an end to years of speculation on whether China would develop a new aircraft to replace its half century-old H-6 bomber series, state-run China Daily reported.

Though he did not provide details, China's definition of a long-range bomber is to have a minimum range of 8,000 kilometres without refueling, experts say. Currently, the PLA Air Force only has an unknown number of H-6 bombers, which were developed based on the Soviet-era Tu-16 Badger that was designed in the 1950s and retired by Russia in the early 1990s, the report said.

US Strategic Air Command has the Boeing B-52, Rockwell B-1 and the Northrop Grumman B-2 Stealth Bomber, while Russia's Long Range Aviation Command has the Tupolev Tu-160, Tu-95 and T-22M.

- PTI inputs