

Chinese submarine visit to Karachi port no threat to India: Beijing

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Beijing: A Chinese submarine's visit to Pakistan was in no way a threat to India, according to a military spokesman of the defence ministry here.

Asked by visiting journalists to the Chinese ministry of national defence whether such a visit could be seen as a threat to India, as some commentators have said, Major Jiang Bin, staff officer on Asian Affairs at the ministry, said that military relations between China and Pakistan were "never directed at India".

He said Beijing recognised that there was a problem between Pakistan and India on some issues, but for China, Pakistan was its "traditional friendly country", and relations with India were "developing quite well in recent years" especially after top-level visits between the countries.

Later, defence ministry spokesperson Yang Yujun reiterated this, saying China's relationship with one nation was "not directed at a third party".

Yujun, who holds the rank of a senior colonel equivalent to a brigadier-general in the army hosted Indian journalists from India and Indian journalists based in Beijing, answered a wide variety of questions on India-China military relations and Beijing's military strategy.

The spokesman also said it was not the first vessel of the Chinese navy that had visited Pakistan and that such visits had taken place to several countries, including Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India.

The visit by the submarine in May to Karachi was seen by commentators in India as raising the level of cooperation between the two countries which could eventually be a threat to India.

Jiang said that the Pakistani side had also raised concern about the growing relationship between China and India and they wanted to know if this would affect them. He said the issue was similar.

He felt that interaction at the highest level between China and Pakistan and China and India would pave the way for increased friendly relations between the three neighbours. He also said that when Pakistan and India differed on issue, "China can serve as some kind of a bridge" between the two.

He said his country hoped that India and Pakistan could solve their problems in a peaceful manner which would be to the benefit of all the three countries.

Jiang also said that when the two countries "exchanged some words" and found it difficult to talk to each other "sometimes, we can help".

Jiang, who helps in "evolving" matters related to Pakistan and India in the ministry, said that China was glad to see that the two immediate neighbours were engaging in direct dialogue with each other. "It might take some time to completely solve the problem", but he felt they were moving in the right direction.

He said even with India, joint search exercises began in 2003, and that Indian navy ships have visited Shanghai, including a four-vessel visit which was rare. "Our ships have gone to visit Mumbai and Kochi", and there was a large amount of cooperation between the navies of the two countries.

He said his reading was that the Indian side had an understanding about Chinese ship's visit to Pakistan and that the Indian government had invited the Chinese navy to take part in the international fleet review to be undertaken in 2016. This was under active consideration of the government and coordination was going on a military basis among the two countries, he added.

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