

No intention to surround India in 'string of pearl' bases: China

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Shanghai: Itâ€™s not possible for China to surround India in a â€˜string of pearlsâ€™ bases as has been stated by some commentators, according to a top PLA naval official.

Senior Captain Wei Xiao Dong, chief of staff at the Shanghai Naval Garrison said that there was no reason for India to â€˜show concern or worry aboutâ€™ Chinese navy vessels, including submarines, visiting countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh or others.

â€˜China does not have a policy of hegemony or is playing to be a military power in the region,â€™ Wei told a group of visiting Indian journalists. â€˜Our policy is defensive in nature,â€™ he said.

He said such visits were not as common as was sometimes made out. â€˜I have been in the navy since 1987 and I have not sailed in a warship to the Indian Ocean.â€™

He emphasised that there was no possibility of China creating a â€˜string of pearlsâ€™ around India.

He said one need only to refer to Chinaâ€™s white paper on military strategy to realise that china only believes in a defensive approach and had no intention of expanding its military influence to other countries.

He said the visit to Pakistan has been noted in India with concern. But China, he added, had an enhanced level of cooperation with India too.

â€˜Looked at another way, should we reduce our visits to Pakistan and increase them to India. In such a case will Pakistan fear our cooperation with India?â€™ he asked. He said the relations with the two countries were only on a bilateral basis.

He said in the past four ships from India had visited the Shanghai base together and he â€˜always looks forwardâ€™ to Indian ships visiting there.

He said he did not have much information on the status of Chinaâ€™s aircraft carrier. It was in Qindao region for training purpose. In any case, he said the carrier was not under the jurisdiction of East China Sea Fleet which was his area of operation.

Wei said one of his mandates in Shanghai was to act as anti-terrorism force and ensure peace and tranquillity in the region, including the areaâ€™s coastal cities. He said they had not come under any terrorism-related attack, but they study such action around the world to gain information on how to react. He was responding to a question whether they feared an attack of the kind that happened in Mumbai in 2008 when terrorists came in boats from Karachi.

The visiting journalists were taken on a rare tour of a guided missile frigate Tongling docked at Shanghai and shown its fighting capabilities, including its anti-submarine and anti-air attack capacity.

Talking of Indian navyâ€™s presence in South China Sea, which the country, deems to be its region, Wei said that he did not know what the â€˜strategic intentionâ€™ of India was in the region. Indian ships had entered the sea a few years ago when Indian public sector companies were invited to explore oil in Vietnamese waters.

On Diaoyu islands disputed between China and Japan, Wei said they were "part of" the Chinese territory and it was responsibility of the navy to protect its "sovereign areas". He said it was "legal for china to patrol the seas around the island in order to ensure peace".

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