
CHINESE WARSHIPS ENTER EAST INDIAN OCEAN AMID MALDIVES TENSIONS

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Eleven Chinese warships sailed into the East Indian Ocean this month, a Chinese news portal said, amid a constitutional crisis in the tiny tropical island chain of the Maldives now under a state of emergency.

A fleet of destroyers and at least one frigate, a 30,000-tonne amphibious transport dock and three support tankers entered the Indian Ocean, news portal Sina.com.cn said, without linking the deployment to the crisis in the Maldives or giving a reason.

If you look at warships and other equipment, the gap between the Indian and Chinese navy is not large, Sina.com.cn said on Sunday.

It did not say when the fleet was deployed or for how long.

Rivalry between old foes India and China for influence in the Maldives became evident after President Abdulla Yameen signed up to Beijings Belt and Road initiative to build trade and transport links across Asia and beyond.

India, which has had longstanding political and security ties to the islands about 400 km (250 miles) away, has sought to push back against Chinas expanding presence in the overwhelmingly Muslim country of 400,000 people. Maldivian opposition leaders have urged New Delhi to intervene in the crisis.

Chinas Ministry of Defense did not respond to requests for comment.

On Friday, the Peoples Liberation Army posted photos and a story on rescue training exercises taking place in the East Indian Ocean on its official Twitter-like Weibo account.

China earlier this month advised Chinese citizens to avoid visiting the Maldives, famous its luxury hotels, scuba-diving resorts and limpid tropical seas, until political tensions subside.

China has been striking deals with countries in Asia and Africa in line with its Belt and Road initiative to improve imports of key commodities, upgrade infrastructure and trade routes in the region and boost its diplomatic clout.

Yameen imposed the emergency on Feb. 5 for 15 days to annul a Supreme Court ruling that quashed convictions against nine opposition leaders and ordered his government to free those

held in prison. He sought parliamentary approval to extend the emergency for 30 days on Monday.

China has drawn criticism in the West for its perceived military buildup of the neighboring South China Sea, where it has built and expanded islands and reefs.

China claims most of the sea where neighbors Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have claims.

Kaynak/Source: