
XI JINPING SAYS PLACES 'HIGH PREMIUM' ON PAKISTAN TIES, AS ARMY CHIEF VISITS CHINA

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China places a "high premium" on its relations with Pakistan and believes a key economic project will be successful, President Xi Jinping told Pakistan's army chief, days after a Pakistani minister stirred unease about Chinese Silk Road schemes.

General Qamar Javed Bajwa is the most senior Pakistani figure to visit ally China since the new government of Prime Minister Imran Khan took office in August, and his trip comes a week or so after a senior Chinese diplomat visited Islamabad.

Pakistan has deepened ties with China in recent years as relations with the United States have frayed.

Gen Bajwa may be hoping to smooth out any Chinese alarm at comments last week by Pakistan's commerce minister Abdul Razak Dawood, who suggested a year's suspension for projects in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the Pakistan leg of China's Belt and Road Initiative that includes recreating the old Silk Road trading route.

Meeting Gen Bajwa on Wednesday (Sept 19), Mr Xi said the two countries were "iron friends", China's official Xinhua news agency said on Thursday.

"China always places a high premium on China-Pakistan relations," the report cited Mr Xi as saying.

Mr Xi expressed his appreciation for the support and security safeguards provided by Pakistan for the Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor construction, Xinhua added.

"As long as high-degree mutual trust and concrete measures are in place, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor construction will succeed and deliver benefits to people of the two countries," Mr Xi said.

Beijing has pledged to invest about US\$60 billion (\$82 billion) in Pakistan for infrastructure for the Belt and Road project.

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