
CHINESE VICE-PRESIDENT WANG QISHAN SAYS BEIJING BACKS PAKISTAN'S EFFORTS TO MANAGE RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBOURS

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Chinese Vice-President Wang Qishan on Tuesday said China supported Pakistans efforts to manage its relationships with its neighbours.

In a meeting with Pakistans Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Wang said the relationship between China and Pakistan had withstood many challenges.

China supports Pakistans efforts to seize development opportunities and handle challenges, and manage its ties with neighbours, Wang was quoted as saying by state-run CCTV.

Qureshi, who arrived in China on Sunday, also met his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi for the first strategic dialogue between the countries foreign ministers.

The conflict between India and Pakistan, triggered by a suicide bomb attack in jointly administered Kashmir that killed 40 Indian paramilitary police officers last month, was on the agenda, the Chinese foreign ministry said.

Beijing and Islamabad have long had strong ties and Pakistan has become known as Chinas iron brother. Beijing said it would play a constructive role in reducing tensions and push for peace between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

A Chinese diplomatic observer said the latest visit by Qureshi could be seen as an opportunity for Beijing to underline its support for Pakistan.

Pakistan and China are all-weather partners, so the visit by the foreign minister could be a political symbol of Chinas support for Pakistan, said Hu Zhiyong, a research fellow at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Institute of International Relations.

Qureshis trip also comes as Beijing is preparing for the second Belt and Road Initiative summit in April, the most high-profile domestic diplomatic event of the year for Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Islamabad has not yet announced who will attend, but Hu played down Qureshis part in preparations for the summit and the timing of the trip.

Theres no need to read too much into [Qureshis visit], Hu said. Its part of diplomatic protocol for the foreign minister to visit ... no matter if the conflict [in Kashmir] happened or not.

Pakistan has a special role in Chinas belt and road relationships with the multibillion-dollar China-

Pakistan Economic Corridor, which aims to connect Xinjiang in Chinas far west with the Pakistani Arabian Sea port of Gwadar.

The network of motorways, railways, oil pipelines and trading centres was hailed by Beijing as a flagship among hundreds of its projects across the region, though questions have been raised over whether Beijing has overestimated its value since it could be vulnerable to pressure from separatism and terrorism.

The corridor has also drawn suspicion from India, which refused to endorse Beijings investment and infrastructure push as part of the project runs through disputed Kashmir.

The latest conflict between Pakistan and India has also tested Beijings relations with New Delhi. Last week, China blocked an Indian request to the United Nations Security Council to place the leader of a Pakistan-based militant group, Masood Azhar, on a sanctions list. Azhar is the founder of Jaish-e-Mohammed, the group that claimed responsibility for the attack on Indian police in Kashmir last month.

New Delhi said it was disappointed by Beijings decision, while a leading trade association in India called for a boycott of Chinese products in response.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3002392/chinese-vice-president-wang-qishan-says-beijing-backs>

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