

INDIA CALLS PAK MOVE TO INCLUDE J&K IN NEW MAP AS 'POLITICALLY ABSURD'

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By unveiling the new map, Pakistan seems to be taking a leaf out of Nepal's playbook

NEW DELHI : First it was Nepal. Now it seems Pakistan has followed in Kathmandu's footsteps and committed cartographic aggression by showing sections of India as within its boundaries in a new map that was made public on Tuesday, according to news reports.

India slammed it as an "exercise in political absurdity" without "legal validity nor international credibility."

The new "political" map of Pakistan, unveiled by Prime Minister Imran Khan, shows all of India's Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir—besides the Junagadh region of Gujarat —as falling within its borders.

Traditionally Pakistani maps have included parts of Jammu and Kashmir like Gilgit and Baltistan as lying within Pakistani borders.

"This is the most historic day in Pakistan's history," Khan was quoted as saying at a press conference where he made the map public. The map, backed by all political parties, aims to oppose "the Indian government's illegal act of 5 August last year," Khan said in reference to India's Parliament revoking Article 370 of its Constitution that bestowed special status on Kashmir.

Pakistan, caught off guard, was incensed by the move as it integrated the region more closely with India and took it off the dialogue table with Islamabad.

New Delhi said the administrative change was aimed at ensuring development reached the people of the region who had suffered from decades of terrorism perpetrated by Pakistan.

On Tuesday, India's response was sharp.

"This is an exercise in political absurdity, laying untenable claims to territories in the Indian State of Gujarat and our Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and of Ladakh," the foreign ministry said.

"These ridiculous assertions have neither legal validity nor international credibility. In fact, this new effort only confirms reality of Pakistan's obsession with territorial aggrandisement supported by cross-border terrorism."

In its actions, Islamabad seemed to be taking a leaf out of Nepal's book.

In May, Nepal unveiled a new map which included the areas of Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani as lying within its borders. While India and Nepal had been showing the areas of Lipulekh and Kalapani as parts of their respective territories, Kathmandu in May added a third area—Limpiyadhura—to its territory.

India criticized the move as "unilateral" and as "not based on historical facts and evidence."

Clearly stating that "such artificial enlargement of territorial claims will not be accepted by India," the foreign ministry urged Nepal to "refrain from such unjustified cartographic assertion and respect India's sovereignty and territorial integrity." Undeterred, Nepal went ahead and got the map passed by its parliament in June.

Pakistan's move also comes against the backdrop of a border standoff between India and China, with tensions running high since May when New Delhi detected multiple intrusions into Indian territory by the Chinese army.

Talks at the level of diplomats and senior military commanders have not been able to break the impasse so far.

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