

China sends PLA unit to man overseas base

Stronger vigil:A ship carrying Chinese military personnel departs a port in Zhanjiang, Guangdong province, on Tuesday.AP

China has dispatched People's Liberation Army (PLA) personnel to man its first overseas military base at Djibouti in the strategic Indian Ocean region, a move likely to spark concerns in the U.S.

Ships carrying Chinese military personnel departed Zhanjiang in southern China's Guangdong Province on Tuesday to set up a support base in Djibouti, located in the Horn of Africa, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Shen Jinlong, commander of the PLA navy, read an order on constructing the base in Djibouti, and conferred the military flag on the fleets.

The establishment of the PLA Djibouti base was a decision made by the two countries after friendly negotiations, and accords with the common interest of the people from both sides, the PLA navy said. The base will ensure China's performance of missions, such as escorting, peace-keeping and humanitarian aid in Africa and West Asia, the report said.

Joint drills

The base will also conduct overseas tasks, including military cooperation, joint exercises, evacuating and protecting overseas Chinese and emergency rescue, as well as jointly maintaining security of international strategic seaways.

Djibouti base, which China says is more of a logistical and resting centre than a military base, was under construction since 2011.

It is the first such base being set up by China. The second base is coming up in Gwadar, Pakistan, which links up with China through the \$50 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

In March this year, Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* had reported that China plans to increase the size of its marine corps from 20,000 to 1 lakh personnel for overseas deployment, including at Gwadar and Djibouti.

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