

'Coordinated patrol can prevent another Doklam'

The Chinese scholar said the idea of synchronising patrolling was not novel, but it could be more institutionalised after PM Modi's recent meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Indian and Chinese troops may coordinate their patrolling in 16 "grey areas" along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) to prevent Doklam-type standoffs along the borders, a leading Chinese scholar has said.

In an interview with *The Hindu*, Hu Shisheng, senior researcher at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), a premier think-tank, said both countries were aware of the each other's deployments along the LAC. But in recent years, they have not been coordinating their patrols, especially in 16 "grey areas" where rival border claims sharply collide.

"The deployment does not matter. Both sides know each other's deployment. The problem is the patrolling route. Real time coordination on patrolling routes is one of the effective ways of avoiding standoffs," Mr. Hu observed. He added: "Because in the past, the standoffs occurred in those grey areas, coordinated patrolling now could be one of the ways of preventing standoffs."

Mr. Hu said the idea of synchronising patrolling is not novel. But after last month's Wuhan informal summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping, coordinated patrolling could be more strongly "institutionalised".

"In the past there had been some understanding on patrolling from either side. When Chinese soldiers came in, Indians kept away from them. When they left, Indian troops would return." But the practice was shelved since the beginning of this century, when frequent patrols were mounted in the "grey areas" to reinforce the urgency of clarifying the LAC, and marking claims. "In the future, it is very likely that standoffs incidents may not occur."

Referring to the maritime dimension of the China-India ties, the researcher signaled that Beijing and New Delhi could become joint stakeholders in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. He proposed that a comprehensive bilateral maritime dialogue at a ministerial level should be established first, which "not only included diplomats but also high ranking representatives of military and other field related to traditional and non- traditional security".

Such a mechanism "can show to other side that Indian presence in Western pacific, and China's presence in the Indian Ocean is quite normal — it is a natural development, as an expression of the rise of the two countries." He pointed out that Beijing and New Delhi were jointly committed to their unimpeded movement in their maritime region. "We found that China and India want this entire region to be inclusive, open and free for both of us."

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