

# INDIA PROTESTS CHINA-PAKISTAN BUS VIA POK

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New concern: The Lahore-Tashkurgan bus service is scheduled to start on November 3. North South Transport Network

India on Thursday reiterated its opposition to a proposed luxury bus service between Pakistan and China that would pass through parts of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan — territory that India claims — terming it “a violation of India’s sovereignty”, a day after it had summoned a Chinese diplomat to South Block to lodge a strong protest against the initiative.

“We have lodged strong protests with China and Pakistan on the proposed bus service that will operate through areas of Pakistan Occupied Jammu and Kashmir State under the so-called ‘China-Pakistan Economic Corridor’,” the spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) told reporters. “Any such bus service through Pakistan Occupied Jammu & Kashmir State will be a violation of India’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

## India urges cancellation

A Director in the MEA had delivered a note verbale to a Counselor in the Chinese Embassy on Wednesday, urging the cancellation of the bus service that is due to start on November 3, said an official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Both Beijing and Islamabad responded to New Delhi’s protests.

While China asserted that the bus service from Lahore to Tashkurgan in Xinjiang — timed to begin when Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan will be visiting Beijing — did not alter the country’s stance on the Kashmir issue, Pakistan dismissed India’s objections as “frivolous”.

“As for the bus service, I have not heard of the relevant information and I have not heard of complaints,” Lu Kang, China’s foreign ministry spokesperson, said at the ministry’s regular briefing, when asked about India’s protest against the move.

Mr. Lu stressed that the CPEC was an “economic project”, and did not reflect China’s position on Kashmir. “It is an economic cooperation project between China and Pakistan and not targeted at any third party. It has nothing to do with the territorial dispute and it will not affect China’s principled position on the issue of Kashmir,” Mr. Lu observed.

## Red carpet

China is preparing to roll out the red carpet for Mr. Khan, who is set to arrive in Beijing on Friday, and would be formally welcomed at the Great Hall of the People on Saturday. Reacting to India’s statement, the spokesperson for Pakistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said: “India’s repeated regurgitation of claims over Indian Occupied Kashmir can neither change the facts of history nor the legality of the Jammu & Kashmir dispute.”

India has consistently opposed the 1963 “China-Pakistan Boundary Agreement” that recognises PoK as under “actual Pakistani control” without prejudicing a final dispute resolution with India, and India has protested the Karakoram Highway on which traffic has been plying regularly, as well as subsequent infrastructure projects built by China in the disputed area.

Asked on Thursday if India's strong objection to the bus service indicates a "toughening of position", the MEA spokesperson, however, declined to comment.

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