

SEEING NO CAUSE FOR FEAR Assistant foreign minister also seeks to allay India's fears on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

Ahead of 2+2 Dialogue, China says India Natural Partner in BRI

New Delhi: China has sought to woo India just days ahead of the maiden Indo-US 2+2 dialogue, which will aim to strengthen bilateral partnership in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond, by describing the country as a natural partner in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Besides, China has attempted to allay India's apprehensions on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by saying that India should not be paranoid about this project

since it won't affect China's neutral stance on Kashmir issue

"Historically, India was an important country on the ancient Silk Road and it is fair to say that India was a natural partner in the ancient (Silk Road) and (is one) in the Belt and Road Initiative," China's assistant foreign minister Zhang Jun said in Beijing on Monday night. "China has repeatedly stressed that CPEC is an economic initiative. Implementing CPEC does not change China's position on Kashmir."

India has stayed out of BRI and opposed its flagship project CPEC as it runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and therefore violates sov-



ereignty. It has strong reservations against BRI projects on the grounds that these are pushing other countries into debt and even leading to creation of Chinese military bases in some cases. India had refrained from endorsing BRI in Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit declaration in June although it was part of the overall summit declaration as a member.

The CPEC may run into rough weather under the new Imran Khan government since the International Monetary Fund has sought clarity on the mega project before any bailout and his own party has slammed the

previous government for allegedly receiving kickbacks for the project.

Under BRI, China is building a huge network of roads, highways, ports and sea lanes to connect Asia with Europe and Africa. However, BRI is increasingly being viewed as a strategy to expand China's geopolitical influence. Last year India did not attend the maiden BRI summit in Beijing.

In an attempt to reach out to India ahead of the 2+2 dialogue scheduled for September 6, Zhang said, "Let me say a few points. First, India is an important neighbour of China. Both China and India are emerging economies and developing countries."