

# In US trade war, China asks India for support

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**NEW DELHI:** China on Wednesday sought to co-opt India in its trade war against the US, saying the two Asian nations need to deepen cooperation to fight trade protectionism and defend the multilateral trading system as they face “unilateralism and bullying”.

Beijing’s position was outlined by the spokesperson for the Chinese embassy, counsellor Ji Rong, in a statement on China-US relations. A third of the statement was devoted to a call for greater cooperation between the “two largest developing countries and major emerging markets”.

“Practicing unilateral trade protectionism in the name of ‘national security’ and ‘fair trade’ will not only affect China’s economic development, but also undermine the external environment of India and hinder India’s booming economy,” Ji said.

China and India, Ji said, need a “stable external environment” as they are in a vital stage of deepening reform and developing their economies. “Under the current circumstances, China and India need to deepen their cooperation to fight trade protectionism,” she added. There was no reaction to the statement from the external affairs ministry. Following the tense military standoff at Doklam last year, India and China have

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worked to improve their relations. Modi travelled to Wuhan in April for an informal summit with Xi to give impetus to these efforts. The statement also accused the US of interfering in the internal affairs of the two countries and targeted Washington’s Indo-Pacific policy. It said the US “should reflect on its own practice of interfering in the internal affairs of developing countries such as China and India under the pretext of human rights and religious matters”.

Beijing, the statement added, was “firmly against... attempts to use the so-called Indo-Pacific strategy as a tool to counter China”. Noting that President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spoken “with one voice” to safeguard the multilateral trading system and free trade at the World Economic Forum in Davos, the statement said: “China and India share common interests in defending the multilateral trading system and free trade.” It added, “Facing unilateralism and bullying activities,

China and India have more reasons to join efforts to build a more just and reasonable international order.” Constantino Xavier, a fellow at Brookings India, said the statement appeared to reflect an attempt by China to put a wedge between India and the US and to benefit from some of the uncertainty in trade relations between New Delhi and Washington.

“China is trying to assume a leadership position on economic governance. It is also trying to rally support from countries that are concerned, if not upset, by the pressure from the US on trade issues,” he said.

Though US President Donald Trump has been dismantling or questioning institutions and regimes that have managed world trade for decades, it was questionable whether the Chinese move would be sustainable, he said. “Some of the world bodies currently lack leadership and China is trying to use that to develop an alternative order,” Xavier said.

The Chinese embassy’s statement referred to US secretary of state Mike Pompeo’s meetings with top Chinese leaders, including foreign minister Wang Yi, during a visit to Beijing on October 8, and said “China will continue to take necessary measures to defend its sovereignty, and firmly safeguard its security and development interests”.