

Aircraft carrier fleet to visit HK for anniversary



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A port call in Hong Kong by China's aircraft carrier fleet to mark the 20th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army Hong Kong Garrison has been described by experts as a sign of good will and firm determination.

The fleet, which is on a routine training mission at sea before the port call, is expected to arrive early this month and be open to the public for the first time during its stop in Hong Kong to mark the anniversary, which fell on Saturday, Liang Yang, a spokesman for the PLA Navy, said on Sunday.

The formation comprises the CNS Liaoning, China's first aircraft carrier; the CNS Jinan and CNS Yinchuan missile destroyers; the CNS Yantai missile frigate; and J-15 carrier-borne fighter jets and helicopters.

By participating in the anniversary celebrations, the PLA Navy can demonstrate its achievements in defense and military construction to the Hong Kong people, Liang said.

This will further invigorate Hong Kong compatriots' patriotism and love for the city, and inspire national spirit, he added.

The garrison was formally stationed in Hong Kong and assumed defense duties on July 1, 1997, when its sovereignty was returned to China from the United Kingdom.

It currently has about 6,000 personnel and is commanded by Lieutenant General Tan Benhong.

Major General Ma Gang, a professor at the PLA National Defense University, said the fleet's visit demonstrates the PLA Navy's good will, and showcases its firm determination and capability to protect all Chinese people.

"Hong Kong was taken from China by foreign colonial powers in the 1840s, and the Qing government could do little about it because its naval forces were weak," Ma said.

"Now, China has its own aircraft carrier fleet, and its visit to Hong Kong signals a strong sense of reassurance that Hong Kong cannot be taken away again."

Chen Xingxin, a researcher of law and Hong Kong affairs at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said it is understandable and in good will that the carrier fleet is visiting Hong Kong for the anniversary, because both the carrier and the return of Hong Kong are proud milestones in Chinese history.

The CNS Liaoning is a refitted Soviet-era vessel that was commissioned by the PLA Navy in 2012. China also launched its first domestically built aircraft carrier in April.