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## 23rd March 2021 - Editorials/Opinions Analyses

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1. Getting it right on the LAC disengagement
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## **GETTING IT RIGHT ON THE LAC DISENGAGEMENT**

### **Context:**

In the aftermath of the India-China agreement reached on February 10 for pullback in the Pangong Lake area, there has been much speculation about the gain and loss for India.

### **Relevance:**

GS-II: International Relations (India and its Neighbourhood, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests)

### **Mains Questions:**

In the context of India's disengagement at Pangong, bilateral differences are best negotiated from a position of strength. Discuss. (10 Marks)



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**Dimensions of the Article:**

1. India-China Border disputes
2. Causes of border disputes between India and China
3. Evaluating the Withdrawal at Pangong Tso
4. The buffer zone stands
5. Charges on allocation of budget
6. The Infrastructure factors

## **India-China Border disputes**

- The border between India and China is not clearly demarcated throughout and there is no mutually agreed Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- The LAC is the demarcation that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory. India considers the LAC to be 3,488 km long, while the Chinese consider it to be only around 2,000 km.
- The LAC is divided into three sectors, viz. Western, Middle and Eastern.
- The boundary dispute in the Western Sector (Ladakh) pertains to the Johnson Line proposed by the British in the 1860s that extended up to the Kunlun Mountains and put Aksai Chin in the then princely state of Jammu and Kashmir.
- India used the Johnson Line and claimed Aksai Chin as its own. China, however, do not recognise it and instead accepts McDonald Line which puts Aksai Chin under its control.
- In the Middle Sector (Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand), the dispute is a minor one. Here LAC is the least controversial except for the precise alignment to be followed in the Barahoti plains. India and China have exchanged maps on which they broadly agree.
- The disputed boundary in the Eastern Sector (Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim) is over the McMahon Line (in Arunachal Pradesh) decided in 1914 in a meeting of Representatives of China, India, and Tibet in Shimla.
- Though the Chinese representatives at the meeting initiated the agreement, they subsequently refused to accept it.



## Causes of border disputes between India and China

1. Infrastructure Development along the LAC: In the past decade, India has worked hard to strengthen its position on the border and its presence along the LAC. E.g., Dalut Beg Oldie (DS-DBO road) in the northern tip of the western sector greatly facilitates the lateral movement of Indian forces along the western sector, reducing travel time by 40%.
2. Shadow of Doklam Episode: In a broader context, current confrontation is also attributed to the 2017 China-India standoff at Doklam.
3. Reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir: China had earlier also protested against the formation of new Union Territory of Ladakh and accused India of trying to transform the LAC unilaterally.
4. Global backlash against China for mishandling of COVID-19: India also supported a Resolution at the World Health Assembly demanding a fair probe into the origin of Coronavirus. Also, India has recently took over as the chair of the WHO executive Board.
5. Signs of new Chinese aggressiveness: along the Sino-Indian border is one of the



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elements of China's new adventures including o the new security law Beijing has enacted to control Hong Kong.

6. India's steps in Indo-Pacific: India's participation in Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), with strong maritime component, proposals like Supply Chain Resilient initiative are seen by China as potential anti-Chinese alliance of democracies aimed at containing it and checking its maritime rise in the Indo-Pacific.

## Evaluating the Withdrawal at Pangong Tso

- There has been much speculation about the gain and loss for India. Some have averred that the mutual withdrawal amounts to the creation of a "buffer zone on Indian territory".
- Others have alleged it to be a "surrender of Indian territory".
- Yet others have questioned the withdrawal of India's presence along the Kailash range on the South Bank of Pangong since it enabled India to dominate the Chinese garrison at Moldo.

## The buffer zone stands

- India has not surrendered any land in Galwan, Pangong or Depsang since the border crisis broke out in May 2020.
- The assumption that the disengagement implemented at Pangong, especially that the temporary moratorium on patrolling by both sides will result in a buffer zone entirely "in our area", is incorrect.
- India has neither accepted the unilateral definition of China's so-called Line of Actual Control (LAC) of 1959 nor its subsequent mutants.
- As such, a buffer zone on the other side of any so-called Chinese LAC is still a buffer zone on India's side, given that India regards the whole of Aksai Chin as an integral part of its territory.

## Charges on allocation of budget

- The fact of the matter is that the increase in the outlay for capital procurement announced by the Finance Minister for FY 2021-22 represents a 18.75% jump over the previous financial year, the highest in 15 years.
- Moreover, the government has enhanced the delegated financial powers up to Rs. 200 crores in senior ranks below the rank of vice chief as well, to facilitate procurement.



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- Improved procedures and oversight have ensured better utilisation with no surrendering of funds over the last four years.

## The Infrastructure factors

- The building of long overdue roads, bridges, culverts and other infrastructure in the border areas, in mission mode, such as the Atal Rohtang Tunnel, has spurred mobility and capacity for a rapid induction of forces.
- The Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi (DSDBO) Road has facilitated seamless access all the way up to Sub-Sector North (SSN) which abuts the Karakoram Pass and the Siachen Glacier. It has provided an axis for developing lateral roads towards India's frontline in Eastern Ladakh.

## Conclusion

- Instead of commending our military and External Affairs Ministry negotiators for their efforts in ensuring a successful disengagement at Pangong, some commentators have questioned the absence of “iron-clad agreements” for resolving the differences at Depsang or Gogra/Hot Spring, which are still being discussed.
- The negotiators ought to be given a chance. The truth is that there were no iron-clad guarantees in any of the agreements and protocols signed so far either, whether in 1993, 1996 or in 2005.
- Bilateral differences are best negotiated from a position of strength as has been done at Pangong, while maintaining high vigil and striving for positive outcomes elsewhere.

*-Source: The Hindu*