

STEP BY STEP: ON INDIA-CHINA LAC STAND-OFF

Talks will not find an immediate resolution to the LAC stand-off, but a start has been made

With official talks getting under way over the weekend, the month-long stand-off between Indian and Chinese soldiers along the LAC in Ladakh and Sikkim has entered a more considered phase. There was little expectation that the videoconference on Friday, held between External Affairs Ministry officials in Delhi and their Ministry of Foreign Affairs counterparts in Beijing, and talks between the Leh Corps Commander with the South Xinjiang Military Region Commander, held in the Chushul-Moldo region on China's side of the LAC on Saturday, would bear fruit immediately. However, statements from both sides that the talks will continue indicate a desire to resolve the situation. The MEA and the MFA have also reiterated their commitment to abide by agreements between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping, which came after the last big stand-off, at Doklam in 2017, to not allow "differences to escalate into disputes". During the Doklam incident, even after a meeting between the leaders on the sidelines of a G-20 summit, it had taken several high-level engagements to ensure a drawdown to the 73-day stand-off.

Given the differences between the situation now and previous incidents, it would be naive to assume that this stand-off can be resolved quickly through talks. The stand-off is at more than one location, including the Finger areas of the Pangong Tso, Galwan Valley and Gogra post in Ladakh and the Naku La pass in Sikkim, and it will require careful study to decide how to de-induct soldiers. Furthermore, a "status quo ante" will require that Chinese soldiers vacate areas where they have dug in for weeks now. Nothing short of their full withdrawal should satisfy India, which means that more than talks on the ground and by diplomats, there is a need for strong political direction from Beijing to the PLA to do that. Otherwise, India must prepare for a long-drawn stand-off, and manoeuvres aimed at ensuring China's pull back. In addition, even as the government tries to analyse the reasons for China's aggressive action, it must introspect on signals it misread and warnings that went unheeded across its strategic command. If such skirmishes normally follow the melting of snowlines, for example, then why was the LAC not adequately manned in April-May? Serious notice should have been taken of China's protests on the redrawing of the Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh maps, as well as the impact of the Home Minister's vow in Parliament to "take back" Aksai Chin. The Defence Minister has said that Chinese troops arrived in "heavy numbers" and therefore the government must also study what intelligence was received ahead of such movement, and when action was taken upon it. Finally, why has the stand-off emerged at all, after the intense summit-level conversations in Wuhan and Mamallapuram to discuss building trust at the LAC? Given the government's silence on events thus far, it is unlikely that it will put out answers to these questions publicly, but in any event, they must be sought.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- ❖ **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** (noun) – the de-facto (effective) border between India and China. The LAC is a 4,057-km border running through three areas-Western (Ladakh, Ladakh (Kashmir)), middle (Uttarakhand, Himachal) and eastern (Sikkim, Arunachal).
- ❖ **stand-off** (noun) – deadlock, stalemate, impasse (in a dispute/conflict).
- ❖ **under way** (phrase) – going on, continuing, in progress.
- ❖ **counterpart** (noun) – a person who serves the same job/function but in a different location.

- ❖ **bear fruit** (phrase) – yield/get results, succeed, be effective.
- ❖ **reiterate** (verb) – repeat, say again, restate.
- ❖ **abide by** (verb) – conform to, adhere to, comply with.
- ❖ **difference** (noun) – disagreement, difference of opinion, misunderstanding.
- ❖ **escalate** (verb) – increase, intensify, become more serious.
- ❖ **on the sidelines** (phrase) – it refers to a meeting/forum occurs at the same time as the scheduled meeting/forum, but is not itself an item on the agenda.
- ❖ **summit** (noun) – meeting, conference.
- ❖ **drawdown** (noun) – reduction, decrease.
- ❖ **given** (preposition) – considering, taking into account, bearing in mind.
- ❖ **naive** (adjective) – easily taken in, over-trusting, ignorant, immature.
- ❖ **Finger area** (noun) – The 134 km of Pangong lake's northern bank juts/extends out like a palm, and the various protrusions/projections are identified as "fingers" to demarcate territory. While India asserts that the LAC (Line of Actual Control) starts at Finger 8, China claims it starts at Finger 2, which India dominates. (Courtesy: **The Print**).
- ❖ **pass** (noun) – a navigable (passable) route (road/passage) through a mountain range.
- ❖ **post** (noun) – border outpost, a military base/camp, command post (for border patrol).
- ❖ **de-induct** (verb) – remove (from a position /place).
- ❖ **furthermore** (adverb) – moreover, additionally, besides.
- ❖ **status quo ante** (phrase) – a Latin phrase meaning "the state of affairs existing before" (or) "the way things were before".
- ❖ **dug in** past and past participle of **dig in** (phrasal verb) – to protect oneself by digging trenches (trench is a hole/depression/excavation/ditch in the ground).
- ❖ **nothing short of** (phrase) – nothing less than.
- ❖ **on the ground** (phrase) – in a situation/place where things are happening really/practically.
- ❖ **diplomat** (noun) – envoy, consul, ambassador.
- ❖ **People's Liberation Army (PLA)** (noun) – People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the armed forces of the country of China and Communist Party of China (CPC). It is one of the largest military forces in the world.
- ❖ **long-drawn** (adjective) – prolonged, protracted, lengthy, extended, long-lasting/dragging.
- ❖ **manoeuvres** (noun) – military exercises/activities.
- ❖ **pull back** (phrasal verb) – withdraw, retreat, disengage.
- ❖ **aggressive** (adjective) – hostile, belligerent, bellicose, combative, hawkish, warlike.
- ❖ **introspect** (verb) – self-examine, self analyse.
- ❖ **misread** (verb) – get wrong, judge/interpret incorrectly.
- ❖ **unheeded** (adjective) – disregarded, ignored, neglected.
- ❖ **strategic command** (noun) – the strategic command consists a group of (military intelligence) officers to give national leadership a unified resource for greater understanding of specific threats around the world and the means to respond to those threats rapidly.
- ❖ **skirmish** (noun) – a small or minor fight/conflict; tussle/quarrel, squabble.
- ❖ **snow line** (noun) – the boundary between snow-covered surface and snow-free surface. The level (altitude) above which snow will lie all year.
- ❖ **man** (verb) – (of personnel) work at a place to patrol/guard the border.

- ❖ **vow** (noun) – pledge, promise, commitment.
- ❖ **take back** (phrasal verb) – capture, seize, gain possession of something.
- ❖ **Aksai Chin** (noun) – a territory in Ladakh, is under illegal Chinese occupation.
- ❖ **intelligence** (noun) – (military) information.
- ❖ **thus far** (phrase) – until now, till date.
- ❖ **unlikely** (adjective) – not likely, improbable, doubtful.
- ❖ **put out** (phrasal verb) – publish, release, publicize/circulate.
- ❖ **in any event** (phrase) – regardless, whatever happens, no matter what, anyhow.
- ❖ **seek** (verb) – ask for, request, appeal for.

SELLING SPACE: ON SPACEX'S MISSION TO SPACE

SpaceX's mission carrying humans to space marks a new age in commercial space flight

For the United States to send American astronauts to space from American soil after a gap of nine years is a milestone in itself. That this took place at the time of one of the biggest civil rights upsurges since the 1960s makes it almost like an escape to fantasy, riding on the wings of a public-private partnership between NASA and Elon Musk's SpaceX. The less expensive journey is a clear financial advantage as the U.S. has been paying the Russians \$80 million to put one astronaut into space ever since they stopped NASA's human space launch programme. Thus, SpaceX comes in to provide advantages in costs, innovation and safety. In the 2000s, when Mr. Musk showed off his rockets and lobbied in Washington DC, he was mostly ignored, yet now, NASA wants him to find customers for space flights. This can expand the power of U.S. commerce exponentially. Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa has already signed up as a potential traveller to the moon and back. With this partnership, Americans have taken yet another leap of faith in creating commerce in space. If his plans get realised, Mr. Musk could make space flights as common as domestic flights. Technologically, it is a remarkable feat. The collaboration brings in a 'willingness to fail' which has kept SpaceX alive. This is coupled to the propensity to 'qualify every component', which has been NASA's strength.

NASA has partially outsourced its work of innovating, testing and building new technology to market players such as SpaceX. It has made clear its desire to invite more such innovative space companies to participate. India under Prime Minister Modi has also opened up the space sector including ISRO facilities to private players. The emergence of successful partnerships here will likely depend on how well they stand up against the American example of allowing for failure. 'Fly, test, fail, fix' has been the rubric followed by SpaceX. India has not witnessed such huge experiments in space except by the state-led ISRO, its most recently celebrated one being the Mars Orbiter Mission at the cost of ₹7 per km, which is cheaper than autorickshaw travel as cited by Mr. Modi himself, famously. ISRO already has a competitive edge in the global market for space technology. The opening up of space technologies could harbour many an innovation of this kind; however, it calls for a high degree of accountability coupled with a non-partisan approach on the part of all players. The state's role as a just arbiter in finding a delicate balance between entrepreneurial adventure and vested interests is a prerequisite to compete in space with the superpowers.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- ❖ **SpaceX** (noun) – SpaceX is an American aerospace manufacturer and space transportation services company headquartered in Hawthorne, California. It was founded in 2002 by Elon Musk with the goal of reducing space transportation costs to enable the colonization of Mars.
- ❖ **mark** (verb) – indicate, represent, signify, herald.
- ❖ **upsurge** (noun) – sudden increase or rise of something.
- ❖ **escape to fantasy** (phrase) – taking an imaginary excursion (trip) to a happier, more hopeful place.
- ❖ **ride on** (phrasal verb) – depend on.
- ❖ **show off** (phrasal verb) – display one's abilities.
- ❖ **lobby** (verb) – seek to influence, try to persuade, urge.
- ❖ **exponentially** (adverb) – rapidly, quickly, swiftly (in relation to an increase of something).
- ❖ **sign up** (phrasal verb) – commit, conclude, agree (formally).
- ❖ **potential** (adjective) – possible, likely, probable.
- ❖ **leap** (noun) – a sudden/quick jump; change, move.
- ❖ **feat** (noun) – achievement, accomplishment, attainment, triumph.
- ❖ **collaboration** (noun) – cooperation, joint action, partnership.
- ❖ **keep alive** (phrasal verb) – keep going, continue, sustain.
- ❖ **(be) couple to** (verb) – combine, integrate, associate, accompany.
- ❖ **propensity** (noun) – tendency, inclination, predisposition, readiness.
- ❖ **outsource** (verb) – assign (work) to others, contract out.
- ❖ **depend on** (verb) – be based on, rely on, be conditional on.
- ❖ **of its kind** (phrase) – similar to what has been mentioned/told.
- ❖ **open up** (phrasal verb) – make available (to create/start developing new opportunities).
- ❖ **stand up against** (phrasal verb) – defy, challenge, oppose someone in a determined way.
- ❖ **rubric** (adjective) – an evaluation tool; a set of guidelines/instructions.
- ❖ **competitive edge** (noun) – a factor which gives (a person, a company) an advantage over enemies, rivals, etc.
- ❖ **harbour** (verb) – nurse, nurture, cherish, foster, possess (an ambition/hope in one's mind).
- ❖ **call for** (phrasal verb) – require, publicly ask/necessitate, demand.
- ❖ **accountability** (noun) – responsibility, liability, answerability.
- ❖ **non-partisan** (adjective) – fair, unbiased, impartial, neutral.
- ❖ **arbiter** (noun) – someone who has ultimate authority/power.
- ❖ **delicate** (adjective) – (of a condition) easily damaged.
- ❖ **entrepreneurial** (adjective) – enterprising; relating to the capacity and willingness to develop, organize and manage a business venture along with any of its risks in order to make a profit.
- ❖ **adventure** (noun) – enterprise, undertaking, project, mission.
- ❖ **vested interest** (noun) – a personal interest in something to get benefit.
- ❖ **prerequisite** (noun) – essential/necessary condition, requirement.
- ❖ **superpower** (noun) – a nation which is very powerful and possesses military, political or economic might (power) with dominant status on the globe. (like the Soviet Union (erstwhile) or United States of America).