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**India-China Agreement: Breaking a  
Stalemate**

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## INDIA-CHINA AGREEMENT: BREAKING A STALEMATE

### Context

- In a significant diplomatic development, **India and China** held their first bilateral talks in five years on the **sidelines of the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia**, marking a crucial step towards mending the strained relations between the two neighbouring countries, which have been marred by a prolonged military standoff along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh**.

### Background

- The roots of the current standoff trace back to China's aggressive manoeuvres along the LAC in 2020, which led to a prolonged military confrontation.
- The **Galwan Valley clash** in June 2020, resulting in casualties on both sides, was the most severe conflict between the two nations in decades.
- Since then, both countries have engaged in numerous rounds of diplomatic and military talks to de-escalate the situation, but with limited success.

### 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.
- It is divided into **three sectors**:
  - the **eastern sector** which spans Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim;
  - the **middle sector** in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, and;
  - the **western sector** in Ladakh.
- LAC in the eastern sector consisting of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim is called the **McMahon Line** which is 1,140 km long.



### Major friction points along the India-China border

- Depsang Plains:** This area is located in the northernmost part of Ladakh and has seen incursions by Chinese troops in the past.
- Demchok:** This area is located in eastern Ladakh and has seen disputes over the boundary between India and China.
- Pangong Lake:** This area has been a major flashpoint between the two countries, with Chinese troops attempting to change the status quo on the LAC in the region.

- Gogra and Hot Springs: These two areas are located in eastern Ladakh and have seen standoffs between Indian and Chinese troops in recent years.
- Arunachal Pradesh: This northeastern Indian state is claimed by China as part of its territory and has been a major point of contention between the two countries.

### How is the LAC different from the Line of Control with Pakistan?

- The LoC emerged from the 1948 ceasefire line negotiated by the UN after the Kashmir War.
- It was designated as the LoC in 1972, following the Shimla Agreement between the two countries. It is delineated on a map signed by DGMOs of both armies and has the international sanctity of a legal agreement.
- The LAC, is only a concept and it is not agreed upon by the two countries, neither delineated on a map or demarcated on the ground.

### Agreement: Reviving Bilateral Ties

- India and China emphasised the importance of maintaining peace and tranquillity at the border, underscoring that mutual trust, respect, and sensitivity should form the foundation of their relationship.
- The Indian Prime Minister highlighted that the restoration of peace in the border areas is essential for the normalisation of bilateral relations.
- The recent agreement, as reported, involves the **restoration of patrolling rights** in the **Depsang Plains and Demchok in Ladakh**, areas that have been flashpoints in the ongoing conflict.
- It is seen as a **first concrete step** towards restoring the **pre-2020 status quo ante**. Additionally, agreements have been reached in other sectors along the LAC, including Arunachal Pradesh.

### Significance

- **De-escalation and Stability:** The disengagement process, though just the beginning, is crucial for reducing tensions and preventing further military confrontations. It sets the stage for a gradual de-escalation and de-induction of troops, which will require meticulous monitoring and sustained diplomatic efforts.
- **Bilateral Relations:** For India, this forward movement with China is vital not only for bilateral ties but also for its broader geopolitical strategy.
  - ♦ It opens up diplomatic space for India as it navigates its relationships with major global powers, including Russia and the West.
- **Political Engagement:** A potential meeting between Indian Prime Minister and Chinese President on the sidelines of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** summit could further solidify this agreement and outline future political and economic engagements.

### India-China Partnership and Global Potential

#### Challenges Ahead

- **Implementation:** The disengagement process must be followed by de-escalation and de-induction, which will be a slow and complex process requiring constant vigilance.
- **Trust Deficit:** The relationship between India and China has been marred by a significant trust deficit. Building confidence and ensuring compliance with the agreement will be critical.
- **Broader Issues:** The border issue is just one aspect of the complex India-China relationship. Broader issues, including trade imbalances and geopolitical rivalries, need to be addressed to achieve lasting peace and stability.
  - ♦ Since the 1980s, India and China have sought peaceful resolution of their boundary dispute. **Informal summits** between leaders, like those in **Wuhan (2018)** and **Chennai (2019)**, emphasised **strategic communication and cooperation**.
  - ♦ The unresolved boundary issue remains a point of contention, leading to occasional tensions.

### Conclusion and Way Ahead

- The India-China agreement to restore patrolling rights and begin the disengagement process is a welcome step towards breaking the stalemate. It reflects the patience and fortitude of India's diplomatic and security establishments.
- However, the journey towards lasting peace and stability will require sustained efforts, realistic expectations, and a commitment to dialogue and cooperation.

Source: IE

### Mains Practice Question

**[Q]** How does the India-China agreement before the recent BRICS Summit mark a significant shift in the bilateral relationship, and what are the potential implications for regional stability and global geopolitics?

