

## Darbuk-Shyokh-Daulat Beg Oldie Road

### Why in news?

The construction of the DSDBO road may be the most consequential reason why China is targeting Indian Territory along the LAC in Ladakh.

### What is the current situation?

- Large numbers of Chinese troops had massed along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and had come a little further than they used to earlier.
- The Chinese build-up along the Galwan River valley region overlooks, and hence poses a direct threat to the Darbuk-Shyokh-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road.
- The token mutual de-escalation of the two armies is expected to be completed over an extended period.
- The withdrawals are subject to reciprocal endorsement.

### Where is DSDBO road?

- It is a 255-km long “all-weather” road, running almost parallel to the LAC at Aksai Chin.
- The 37 **prefabricated military truss bridges** along the road are what that makes the DSDBO an all-weather road.
- It meanders through elevations ranging between 13,000 ft and 16,000 ft.
- It took India’s Border Roads Organisation (BRO) almost two decades to construct this road.
- In 2019, 500-m-long Bailey Bridge (the world’s highest bridge) was inaugurated on the road.
- Its strategic importance is that it connects Leh to Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO), virtually at the base of the Karakoram Pass that separates China’s Xinjiang Autonomous Region from Ladakh.

### Where is DBO?

- DBO is the northernmost corner of Indian territory in Ladakh, in the area better known in Army parlance as Sub-Sector North.
- DBO has the **world’s highest airstrip**.
- This airstrip was originally built during the 1962 war.
- It was abandoned until 2008, when the Indian Air Force (IAF) revived it as

one of its many Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) along the LAC.



### What is the importance of the DSDBO highway?

- The DSDBO highway provides the Indian military **access to the section of Tibet-Xinjiang highway** that passes through Aksai Chin.
- The road runs almost parallel to the LAC in Aksai Chin that China occupied in the 1950s.
- The DSDBO's emergence seemingly panicked China.
- This is evidenced by the 2013 intrusion by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China into the nearby Depsang Plains, lasting nearly 3 weeks.

### How is India protecting this region?

- DBO itself is less than 10 km west of the LAC at Aksai Chin.
- A military outpost was created in DBO in reaction to China's occupation of Aksai Chin.
- It is at present manned by a combination of the Army's Ladakh Scouts and the paramilitary Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).
- There are additional strategic considerations in the area.
- To the west of DBO is the region where China has a boundary with Pakistan in the Gilgit-Baltistan area.
- This is also the critical region where China is currently constructing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK), to which India has objected.
- This is the region where Pakistan ceded over 5,180 sq km of PoK to China in 1963 under a Sino-Pakistan Boundary Agreement, contested by India.

### Is there an alternate route?

- An alternate route exists from Leh to DBO through the 17,500-ft-high Sasser Pass.

- [Sasser Pass was part of ancient Silk Route connecting Leh to Yarkand.]
- It leads from the Nubra Valley into the Upper Shyok Valley en route to China's Karakoram Pass.
- This indicates the strategic interlinking of the entire disputed region between India and China and to a lesser extent, Pakistan.
- For most of the year, Sasser pass is snow-bound and inaccessible.
- The BRO is currently building a "glaciated road" between Sasoma (north of Leh, near the Nubra river) to the Sasser Pass, but it could take several years to complete.
- But even when it is, the alternate DBDSO will remain critical to the Army and its defences in the region.

**Source: The Indian Express**

