India-China: Pre-1962 And Now

What is the issue?

- There was clash between Indian and Chinese troops at Galwan in 2020 and altercation between them at Yangtse in Arunachal Pradesh in 2022.
- These events have highlighted the lingering boundary dispute as well as the complex Line of Actual Control (LAC). So, let's examine the India-China relations pre-1962 and now.

What is the point of contention between India and China in 1960s and now?

- Both situations concern the **boundary question**.
- In the 1950s, the focus was on the fundamental question of the "territorial dispute" involving
  - the whole of Aksai Chin claimed by India and
  - the whole of NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh) claimed by China.
- Today, however, with China firmly in occupation of Aksai Chin and India firm in guarding its territorial integrity in Arunachal Pradesh, the immediate issue has moved on to **transgressions along the LAC**.

What is the current situation at different sectors of LAC?

- **Western sector** - The differences in the western sector (Ladakh) are no longer confined to Trig Heights in the Daulet Beg Oldie (DBO) area and Demchok in the south as was the case in earlier decades.
- The Depsang Bulge, Galwan, Pangong Lake and Hot Springs are areas where China is seeking to press expedient claims.
- Since the Galwan incident in 2020, the two sides have disengaged at multiple friction points even as military and diplomatic talks continue to find a way out of the impasse at Depsang and Demchok.
- **Central sector** - In the central sector, the Barahoti pasture north of Chamoli in Uttarakhand has always been at the centre of the dispute.
- **Eastern sector** - In the eastern sector (Arunachal Pradesh), the international boundary and the LAC are defined by the 1914 McMahon Line, based on the watershed principle.
- Yet, China seeks to make inroads in the Tawang sector, the Upper Subansiri region, and near the tri-junction with Myanmar.

What kind of problems does China create?

- China has always projected a bogus interpretation of the LAC.
- It has shied away from clarifying its position through an exchange of large-scale maps except a one-off exchange of maps two decades ago.

- Unlike in the past, India is rapidly building its border infrastructure.
- Eventhough China has had a headstart in building its own, it objects to improved logistics on the Indian side.

What are the other similarities and differences in both the periods?

- Both periods involve **contention over frontier tracts**.
- The frontier tracts underwent redefinition as both India and China came into their own in quick succession in the late 1940s.
- Both the countries sought to interpret their geographies and national identities through clear-cut boundary lines.
- The difference today is that the focus is primarily on the LAC as against the larger boundary dispute though neither side has given up its extensive territorial claims.
- As ties deteriorated, **China's support for Pakistan on Kashmir** became self-apparent in its call for self-determination in the 1960s.
- Today, China openly works in tandem with Pakistan against India's interests to internationalise the issue at the UN.
- **China's internal vulnerabilities** have always cast a shadow on bilateral relations with India.
- Whether under Mao Zedong or Xi Jinping, Tibet has remained a source of insecurity for China.

What are the important lessons to be imbibed from the past?

- In 1962, India was forced to approach the U.S. and other Western countries for military assistance to meet the Chinese challenge.
- But in the current phase, India has rapidly inducted new weapon systems albeit with heavy emphasis on aatmanirbharta (self-reliance) in defence manufacturing.
- The LAC between India and China, not being the result of bilateral negotiations, is frequently open to challenge by either side.
- There are areas along the LAC that have been patrolled by both sides in the past.

What is the conclusion?

- The biggest difference between the situation in the 1960s and now is the political will of the Indian government and the determination of the Indian army to block Chinese patrols, and not just in Yangtse.
- India's endeavour to engage China has been in keeping with India's broader world vision of good-neighbourly and peaceful ties, inclusive growth and development.
- On the contrary, China seeks to build a China-centric hierarchy with scant regard for notions of equality and multipolarity.

Reference

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