India-China Tawang Crisis

What is the issue?

Soldiers of the two sides (India and China) clashed in an area called Yangtse, in the upper reaches of Tawang sector in Arunachal Pradesh.

What is the origin of the border dispute with China?

- After the communists took power in China, they pulled the country out of all international agreements and the so-called “unequal treaties”.
- They demanded a re-negotiation of all its borders.
- The border between China and India has never been delimited.
- In 1960, China’s Premier Zhou Enlai and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru agreed on a detailed examination of the claims by officials and sought to preserve their claims by posting troops along the border.
- In the 1962 war, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) quickly overpowered the Indian troops.

What is the Line of Actual Control (LAC)?

- The LAC separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory.
- It is divided into three sectors
    - Eastern Sector (Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim),
    - Middle Sector (Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh)
    - Western Sector (Ladakh)
- India and China do not agree on the LAC.
- India considers the LAC to be 3,488 km long while the Chinese consider it to be only around 2,000 km.
- In the Eastern Sector, the alignment of the LAC is along the **McMahon Line**, the border that was drawn between Great Britain, China, and Tibet at the 1914 **Simla Convention**.
- The line includes Tawang in the British Empire, which the China disputes.
- In 1993, the two sides signed the Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control.
- However, the reference to the LAC was unqualified to make it clear that it was not referring to the LAC of 1959 or 1962 but to the LAC at the time when the agreement was signed.

What is China’s so-called claim on Arunachal Pradesh?

- **The Claim** - China claims the entire Arunachal Pradesh as its territory.
- It calls the area **“Zangnan”** in the Chinese language and makes repeated references to **“South Tibet**”.

- It has tried to give Chinese names to places in Arunachal Pradesh — it published a list of six such names in 2017, and another 15 names in 2021.
- India has dismissed the Chinese invention of these names.
- **Ground for the claim** - At the 1914 Simla Convention where the McMahon Line was drawn, China was represented by the Republic of China.
- The present communist government came to power only in 1949, when the People's Republic was proclaimed.
- The Chinese representative did not consent to the Simla Convention, saying Tibet had no independent authority to enter into international agreements.

What is the India-China Tawang clash?

- **Tawang** sector located in Arunachal Pradesh is the birthplace of the sixth Dalai Lama and an important pilgrimage centre for Tibetan Buddhists.
- **Yangtse**, which is about 25 km from Tawang town, is a site of regular physical contact between the Indian Army and the PLA.
- The Yangtse incident came days after China said that the joint India-US military exercise **Operation Yudhabhyas** had violated the terms of the 1993 and 1996 border agreements.
- The Chinese activation in the eastern sector is to be viewed against the backdrop of military tensions, and serves to divide the attention of India's security planners.

What is Arunachal important to China?

- **Strategic importance** - Arunachal is important to China because control over it is vital for India's defense of its Northeast.
- Tawang in particular is critical as the strategic Bum La Pass, through which PLA troops invaded the Northeast in 1962, lies north of Tawang town.
- **Cultural significance** - Tawang has cultural, religious, and ecclesiastical links to Tibet as well.
- The Tawang monastery is the largest Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the world after the Potala Palace
- **Political significance** - It has political significance to Tibetans, as it was at this monastery that the present Dalai Lama stayed for several weeks after escaping from China in 1959.
- It is therefore an important site in the history of Tibetan resistance to Chinese rule.

What efforts were taken recently regarding the border dispute?

- After the PLA incursions into eastern Ladakh in 2020, the two sides held 16 rounds of talks for disengagement at the so-called friction points.
- The disengagement has led to the withdrawal of both sides from places, including Galwan, Pangong Lake, Gogra and Hot Springs, and the creation of buffer areas at these places.
- However, the status quo that existed before the incursions has not been restored.
- The infrastructure development on the Chinese side has continued, including the

building of roads and even two bridges over Pangong Tso, giving the PLA easier access to the souther bank of the lake.

References

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