# Indo-China Border Disputes

## Why in news?

At the Pangong Tso lake area on the LAC, there have been some clashes between Indian and Chinese soldiers.

## What is LAC?

- The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is the disputed boundary between India and China.
- The LAC is divided into three sectors: western, middle and eastern.
- The countries disagree on the exact location of the LAC in various areas,
    1. India claims that the LAC is 3,488 km long,
    2. China believes it to be around 2,000 km long.
- The two armies try and dominate by patrol to the areas up to their respective perceptions of the LAC. This often brings them into conflict.
- The LAC mostly passes on the land, but Pangong Tso is a unique case where the LAC passes through the water as well.

## Why is there a dispute in Pangong Tso?

- The points in the water at which the Indian claim ends and Chinese claim begins are not agreed upon mutually.
- Most of the clashes between the two armies occur in the disputed portion of the lake.
- As things stand, 45 km-long western portion of the lake is under Indian control, while the rest is under China's control.
- Eastern Ladakh forms the western sector, to the east of the Karakoram and Ladakh Ranges.
- It runs from the Karakoram Pass in the north to Chumur in the south, almost bordering Himachal Pradesh.
- Pangong Tso lies closer to the centre of this 826 km long disputed border in eastern Ladakh.

## Where is Pangong Tso lake?

- Pangong Tso is a long narrow, deep, **endorheic** (landlocked) lake.
- It is situated at a height of more than 14,000 ft in the Ladakh Himalayas.

- The **brackish water lake** freezes over in winter, and becomes ideal for ice skating and polo.
- In the Ladakhi language, Pangong means extensive concavity, and Tso is lake in Tibetan.

## What is the significance of the lake?

- Pangong Tso Lake has major tactical significance as it lies in the path of the Chushul approach.
- This approach is one of the main approaches that China can use for an offensive into Indian-held territory.
- Indian assessments show that a major Chinese offensive, if it comes, will flow across both the north and south of the lake.
- During the 1962 war, this was where China launched its main offensive.

## Does the region have enough connectivity?

- Over the years, the Chinese have built **motorable roads** along their banks of the Pangong Tso.
- At the Huangyangtan base of the People's Liberation Army at Minningzhen, southwest of Yinchuan stands a massive to-scale model of this disputed area in Aksai Chin.
- It points to the importance accorded by the Chinese to the area.
- Even during peacetime, the difference in perception over where the LAC lies on the northern bank of the lake, makes this contested terrain.
- **1999 road** - In 1999, the Army unit from the area was moved to Kargil for Operation Vijay.
- China took the opportunity to build 5 km of road inside Indian territory along the lake's bank.
- The 1999 road added to the extensive network of roads built by the Chinese in the area, which connect with each other and to the G219 Karakoram Highway.
- From one of these roads, Chinese positions physically overlook Indian positions on the northern tip of the Pangong Tso lake.

## What are the "Fingers" in the lake?

- The barren mountains on the lake's northern bank, called the Chang Chenmo, jut forward in major spurs, which the Army calls "fingers".
- **Claims** - India claims that the LAC is coterminous with Finger 8, but it physically controls area only up to Finger 4.
- Chinese border posts are at Finger 8, while it believes that the LAC passes

through Finger 2.

- Six years ago, the Chinese had attempted a permanent construction at Finger 4, which was demolished after Indians strongly objected to it.
- Chinese use light vehicles on the road to patrol up to Finger 2, which has a turning point for their vehicles.
- If they are stopped by an Indian patrol in between, asking them to return, it leads to confusion, as the vehicles can't turn back.
- **Recent tensions** - The Indian side patrols on foot, and before the recent tensions, could go up to Finger 8.
- Fracas between Indian and Chinese soldiers in May, 2020 happened at Finger 5, which led to "disengagement" between the two sides.
- The Chinese have now stopped the Indian soldiers moving beyond Finger 2. This is an eyeball-to-eyeball situation which is still developing.



## What is the conflict on the water?

- On the water, the Chinese had a major advantage until a few years ago, their superior boats could literally run circles around the Indian boats.
- But India purchased better Tampa boats some 8 years ago, leading to a quicker and more aggressive response.
- Although there are well-established drills for disengagement of patrol boats of both sides, the conflicts on waters have led to tense situations.
- The Chinese have moved in more boats (the LX series) in the lake after the tensions which rose in the area from last month.
- The two sides agree upon the drill for the boats, as per the Standard Operating Procedure.

## What is the drill?

- After a boat from the other side is spotted moving into own waters, an equal number of boats are despatched to confront the intruders.
- The boats stop about 20 feet apart, and both sides unfurl the banners.
- Both banners are on red cloth, with white lettering urging the other side to return in the interest of peace and tranquillity
- The patrol leaders on the respective boats then shout out the same messages using loudhailers.
- The standoff continues for about 10 minutes, each side asks for their banners to be lifted.
- Both sides then unfold another set of banners, which reads: "In the interest of peace and tranquillity we are returning to our side and we trust you will do the same".

- The boats then move away and return to their respective sides.

## What happens if a Chinese boat suddenly makes a move?

- The Chinese boats may try to make a move and get into Indian waters.
- Then, an Indian boat tails it, first giving it a chase and then circling it with high speeds.
- This tactical manoeuvre, called a “whirlpool”, traps the aggressor boat in high currents, forcing it to return as it begins to dip into an eddy.

**Source: The Indian Express**

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