Resolving a Standoff

What is the issue?

- In 2014, a standoff between the Indian and Chinese armies in Ladakh was resolved peacefully through military and diplomatic talks.
- As is happening now, the talks at the military level were held in Ladakh while the diplomatic discussion took place in Beijing.

How issues are solved generally?

- Only **minor issues** like the behaviour of patrols and conduct of banner drills can be resolved by **local military commanders**.
- When it develops into a **major issue**, resolution can only happen at the **diplomatic level**.
- This was seen at Doklam Standoff in 2017.

What was the 2014 crisis?

- The crisis erupted in a dramatic fashion in September 2014, during Chinese President's visit to Ahmedabad with Indian Prime Minister.
- More than thousand Chinese soldiers began pushing their way into Indian Territory in Chumar.

Where is Chumar?

- Chumar is the southern-most portion of Ladakh's boundary with Tibet.
- Like most other places on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh, Chumar is marked by rugged mountains at an altitude of around 16,000 to 18,000 feet, with low temperatures and harsh icy winds.
- It is one of those areas, where India has a road right up to the LAC.

What is the problem for the Chinese?

- There is a sharp cut across a big nala (rivulet) marked on the map as 30R — a sudden relative height of 30 metres.
- On the other side of the nala is the Chinese road.
- However, the sharp cutting does not allow their soldiers to come in vehicles up to their "perception" of the LAC, which lies further to the north of the Indian LAC.

How did the problem escalate?

- The Chinese soldiers come up to 30R in vehicles, then dismount and patrol either on horses or on foot.
- This provides Indian soldiers enough warning time to stop their patrols and force them to return after the banner drill.
- This had led to an increase in Chinese transgressions in the area in 2013 and 2014.
- As tensions mounted, in the second week of September, the Chinese started digging the area of 30R to make a road.
- The local Indian company commander reacted promptly, physically stopping the Chinese and it escalated the crisis.
- The Chinese came in large numbers to an area to the west of Chumar, and by the time Chinese President landed in India, the faceoff had spread along a 10-km frontage of the LAC.
- That was the year, when India had decided to bring one brigade from the reserve division to Ladakh for an exercise during summers.
- This allowed India to stage those troops forward to Chumar quickly.

What was the ground situation?

- At its peak, there were more than 2,500 Indian soldiers deployed against 1,500 Chinese troops.
- Around 800 of these soldiers from each side locked in a faceoff.
- The Chinese realised that the road could no longer be built.
- So, negotiations started at the battalion and brigade commanders-level.

What were the Chinese demands?

- Chinese demands included India stopping the construction of a living shelter for soldiers in Chumar, and a water channel being made in Demchok.
- These were just excuses given by the Chinese.
- But, they were keen on removing the tactical disadvantage of their patrols not being able to come deeper by vehicles.
- Within a few days of negotiations between local military commanders, the Army decided this had to be resolved at the diplomatic level.

How the 2014 crisis was solved?

- Diplomatic talks in Beijing were led by Indian ambassador Ashok Kantha with the India insisting on restoration of status quo ante in the area.
- The Chinese agreed to stop the construction of their road across 30R.
- The local military commanders agreed to a moratorium on patrolling by both

sides in the disputed area for a few weeks.
- The two armies withdrew over the next two weeks.
- The living shelter for Indian soldiers stayed in Chumar.
- The unofficial moratorium on patrolling by both armies in Chumar continued for a couple of years.

Source: The Indian Express

