Significance of Pangong Tso Lake

Why in news?

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A series of clashes between Indian and Chinese army personnel are reported near Pangong Tso Lake.

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What happened recently?

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- Recently violence between the two sides including kicking and punching, the throwing of stones, and the use of sticks and steel rods, leading to severe injuries was reported.
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- Usually the two patrols would have engaged in a “banner drill”, displaying a banner asking the other side to vacate its territory.
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- This drill could last a few minutes to an hour.
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- Except for some occasional jostling, the two sides would disengage quietly.
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- This time Chinese chose to initiate violence against the Indians due to the heightened tensions between the two armies at Doklam on the Sikkim border.
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What is the significance of Pangong Tso?

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- Pangong Tso is a long narrow, deep, landlocked lake situated at a height of more than 14,000 ft in the Ladakh, Himalayas.
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- The 135 km-long lake sprawls over 604 sq km in the shape of a boomerang, and is 6 km wide at its broadest point.

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- The western end of Pangong Tso lies 54 km to the southeast of Leh.
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- The brackish water lake freezes over in winter, and becomes ideal for ice skating and polo.
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- **What are the reasons for the dispute?**
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- The Line of Actual Control (LAC) cuts through the lake, but India and China do not agree on its exact location.
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- In 1999, when 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.
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- From one of these roads, Chinese positions physically overlook Indian positions on the northern tip of the Pangong Lake.
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- As things stand, a 45 km-long western portion of the lake is in Indian control, while the rest is under China's control.
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- Most of the clashes between the two armies occur in the disputed portion of the lake
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What are the rights over this region?

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- The Chinese had a major advantage, their superior boats could literally run circles around the Indian boats.
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- But India purchased better boats, leading to a quicker and more aggressive response.
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- Tourists were not allowed at Pangong Tso until 1999, and even today, one need to obtain an Inner Line Permit from the office of the Deputy Commissioner at Leh.
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- Now tourists are only allowed up to Spangmik village, around 7 km into the lake.

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Source: Indian Express

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