Strategic Significance of Bridge China is building on Pangong Tso

What is the issue?

The ongoing standoff in eastern Ladakh has led to one of the latest constructions of bridge being built by China on the Pangong Tso.

Where is the bridge being built?

- China is building a 400 m long and 8 m wide bridge, close to the friction points on the north bank of the **Pangong Tso**, and the **Chushul** sub-sector on the south bank.
- The bridge is around 20 km east of Finger 8 on the north bank.
- In India's perception, the **Line of Actual Control** lies at Finger 8.
- The site of the bridge is within India's claim line, although the area has been under Chinese control since 1958.
- Pangong Tso is a 135-km-long landlocked lake with more than two-thirds under Chinese control.

Why is this area important?

- **Frequent clashes-** The Fingers on the north bank have seen frequent clashes.
- Finger 4 was one of the first friction areas in the current standoff.
- **Sensitive friction points**- The banks of the lake were among the most sensitive friction points in 2020.
- Troops and tanks faced each other just a few hundred metres apart in some places, until the disengagement in 2021.

How does the bridge help China?

- **Quicker troop mobilisation**- The main objective of the bridge is quick mobilisation of PLA troops between the two banks.
- **Reach the Kailash Range**- The Kailash range is around 35 km west of the bridge site.
- The bridge will enable Chinese troops to simply cross over, slashing travel time to the Kailash range from about 12 hours to about 4 hours.
- **Strengthen the permanency**- The development of this bridge appears to strengthen the idea of permanency being established by Beijing in the region, committing to its territorial claims with India.

What is India's response?

- The Indian government has said that the bridge is being constructed in areas that have been

under the illegal occupation by China for around 60 years now.

- **Increase in budget**- The budget for development of border infrastructure has been significantly increased and more roads and bridges have been completed than ever before by India.
- **Border infrastructure**- Army Chief General M M Naravane said that India too is upgrading and developing infrastructure along the northern border in a holistic manner.
- In 2021, over 100 projects were completed by the Border Roads Organisation in the border areas, most of which were closer to the border with China.
- **Increased surveillance**- India is also improving surveillance along the border, along with building new airstrips and landing areas.
- **Additional troops-** Additional troops have been inducted, and infrastructure and billeting facilities created for 25,000 additional troops who had gone into these areas.

What is the current status of the standoff?

- Several friction points have been resolved, with both sides disengaging from Patrolling Point (PP) 14 in Galwan Valley, north and south banks of Pangong Tso and PP17A near Gogra Post.
- The recent talks remain inconclusive in achieving a breakthrough for the remaining areas.
- China has been blocking Indian troops from accessing its five traditional patrolling points in **Depsang Plains**.
- In **Demchok**, some so-called civilians have pitched tents on the Indian side of the LAC, and have refused to vacate.
- Each side has over 50,000 troops in the region, along with additional air defence assets, artillery, tanks and other weapons.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-strategic-significance-of-bridge-china-is-building-on-pangong-tso-7736021/

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