# The History of Siachen Glacier

\n\n

## What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- The inhospitable Siachen glacier stands at a height of 5,400 m and is regarded as the world's highest battlefield.
\n
- It's now 35 years since India took control over the territory, but the extreme weather and terrain has subjected the troops to sever hardship.
\n

\n\n

## What is Siachen's story?

\n\n

\n
- **Boundary -** After the war of 1947-48, the UN-brokered peace and a Ceasefire Line (CFL) was demarcated as per the Karachi Agreement of 1949.
\n
- The easternmost point of the CFL was "NJ9842", and the territory beyond that was high-peaks and inhospitable – which wasn't demarcated.
\n
- The agreement simply said that the CFL would run north of the three glaciers in the region - Siachen glacier (western most), the Rimo and the Baltoro.
\n
- Notably, CFL itself was to be just a temporary arrangement and was supposed to become irrelevant after the proposed plebiscite in Kashmir in 1950.
\n
- But the plebiscite never took place and CFL was eventually revalidated as the Line of Control (LoC) in the Simla Agreement of 1972.
\n
- While the wars of 1947, 1965 and 1971 saw both militaries crossing across

the CFL on multiple occasions, the region north of NJ9842 was never touched.
\n
- This was because the rigour of the terrain and weather made it impossible for both the militaries to intrude into the sector.
\n
- **Intrusion –** In the 1960's, Pakistan had begun making certain cartographic changes to the CFL beyond the NJ9842, to symbolise its claim.
\n
- The line was visibly being pushed eastward (almost reaching Karakoram Pass), in contrary to the intention of 1949 agreement on the region beyond NJ9842.
\n
- Global mountaineering maps soon started portraying this as the authentic and internationally accepted CFL-LoC, backed by mountaineering legends.
\n
- Pakistan used this change in perception to start permitting foreign expeditions in the area of the Siachen glacier to reinforce its claim on the area.
\n
- By 1978, alerted by these expeditions, Indian Army too began undertaking mountaineering expeditions as a counter measure.
\n
- **Escalation -** Treks were getting increasingly frequent on both sides, but Pakistan had the world's perception on its side.
\n
- Heated diplomatic exchanges of territorial violation were sounded by both sides with regard to the Siachen sector and tensions mounted.
\n
- Increased Pakistani presence led some in Indian Army to demand a permanent summer post at Siachen, but the idea was dropped due to the harsh weather.
\n
- Instead, it was decided that besides mountaineering expeditions, Siachen glacier would be patrolled by the Army during the summer months.
\n
- As tensions over the patrolling arrangement escalated in 1983, intelligence reports suggested that Pakistan was planning to physically occupy Siachen.
\n
- **Occupation -** To avert a possible Pakistani takeover of the strategic Siachen heights, Indian army decided to take the summit pre-emptively.
\n
- On Baisakhi Day (a major religious festival) in 1983, when the enemy would've least expected the commencement of a major operation, India made

its move.
\n
- The mission was to occupy Saltoro Ridge, and the operation was codenamed “Meghdoot”, and the platoon advanced to braze the harsh weather.
\n
- The siachen was soon secured and the two passes from the Pakistani side were sealed off in a comprehensively well executed operation.
\n
- The glacier continues to be occupied by the Indian forced till date, but the financial and human cost of the occupation is indeed massive.
\n

\n\n

## How does the future look?

\n\n

\n
- The 110 Km stretch north of NJ9842 is presently under Indian patrol and about 5000 soldiers are employed for the duty.
\n
- In the past 35 years, the army has had 900 casualties in the sector due to the hostile weather and avalanches (without even a single bullet being fired).
\n
- Also, the costs of maintaining the operations at such a height costs about 6 crores per day, which is a major pinch on the defence budget.
\n
- The ecological impact of the occupation is also immense and many organisations that have called for scaling down military operations at Siachen.
\n
- Hence, it would be prudent to work out a negotiated agreement with Pakistan to keep these pristine non-habitable zones free of conflict.
\n
- Such a move might help in demilitarising the zone and also reduce the burden on our armed forces.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

### Source: Indian Express

\n\n

\n\n

\n\n

\n

