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1. India-China LAC Agreement: What this means, why experts are advising caution

Introduction

Indian and Chinese negotiators have arrived at an agreement on "patrolling arrangements" along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), leading to disengagement and a resolution of the issues that had arisen in these areas in 2020, India has said.

This announcement on Monday was followed by a bilateral meeting on Wednesday between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and China's President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS leaders' summit in Kazan, Russia.

Significantly, Chinese statements through this week have not referred to the agreement on patrolling.

Road to agreement

* In April 2024, Prime Minister Modi told Newsweek magazine that "For India, the relationship with China is important and significant", and "It is my belief that we need to urgently address the prolonged situation on our borders so that the abnormality in our bilateral interactions can be put behind us."

* The Chinese government reacted positively to Modi's remarks. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that the relationship between India and China was "about more than the boundary situation" — and that "China and India maintain close communication through diplomatic and military channels on handling issues related to the border situation and have made positive progress".

* In May, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, in an interview to PTI, expressed hope for the resolution of the remaining issues with China amid the border standoff in Ladakh. Importantly, he said that the outstanding issues primarily revolved around "patrolling rights" and "patrolling abilities".

Question of patrolling

The patrolling pact announced by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Monday is the key pillar of the agreement.

Patrolling is one of the key elements of border management between India and China. Since there is no physical line on the ground that corresponds to maps, Indian troops are expected to go up to the Indian perception of the border before returning to base.

Typically, soldiers either walk or drive up to the patrolling points and leave behind a sign of their presence there. This could be anything Indian — perhaps an empty packet of cigarettes or a matchbox made in India.



Article 4 of the 2005 border pact codifies the conduct of the troops in case of a face-off. Some of the stipulated guidelines are as follows:

- * If the border personnel of the two sides come to a face-to-face situation due to differences in the alignment of the LAC or any other reason, they shall exercise self-restraint and take all necessary steps to avoid an escalation of the situation.
- * Throughout the face-to-face situation, neither side shall use force or threaten to use force against the other.
- * Both sides shall treat each other with courtesy and refrain from any provocative actions.
- * Neither side shall put up marks or signs on the spots.

Contours of agreement

It is learnt that the two sides have agreed to restore patrolling rights to each other in the Depsang Plains and Demchok region — these are areas where the problems are called legacy issues, predating the 2020 Chinese incursions. This means that Indian troops can patrol up to patrolling point (PP) 10 to 13 in the Depsang Plains, and in Charding nullah of Demchok.

The agreement on patrolling arrangements is expected to lead to disengagement, de-escalation and de-militarisation in areas where 50,000 to 60,000 troops are stationed on each side. Officials have said this process is expected to begin in the next week to 10 days.

In press conferences held this week, the Foreign Secretary has shared details of the pact on "patrolling arrangements".

* In Demchok and Depsang, patrolling and grazing activities will resume as it was pre-May 2020. "...In the pending areas under discussion, patrolling and indeed grazing activities, wherever applicable, will revert to the situation as it obtained in 2020," Misri said in Kazan on Tuesday.

* The previous disengagement at friction points such as Galwan Valley, north and south banks of Pangong Tso, Gogra-Hot Springs area have not been reopened for negotiations.

* Misri said he hoped the arrangements can "prevent the kind of clashes that occurred earlier in some areas near the LAC", referring to the Galwan clashes of 2020, in which 20 Indian troops including a Colonel-rank officer and at least four Chinese soldiers were killed. He stressed on close monitoring so that the clashes don't recur.

* He clarified the sequence of the "three Ds": "We are focused on disengagement first, and discussions on de-escalation and de-induction will happen at the appropriate time."

* On Wednesday, he said that the "endorsement" of the agreement by Modi and Xi "should certainly lead to an easing of the situation along the LAC". These steps have "set the process in motion" for bringing relations back to a normal path, and it is necessary for both sides to continue on this path, Misri said.

Caution: 'trust, but verify'

After the Modi-Xi meeting, however, a few divergences emerged.

* The Indian readout said the PM welcomed "the recent agreement for complete disengagement and resolution of issues that arose in 2020 in the India-China border areas". The Chinese statement only said the two leaders "commended the important progress the two sides had...made...on resolving the relevant issues in the border areas".

India has maintained that until the border standoff is resolved, there cannot be business as usual with China. Beijing's position has been that the border issue should not impact bilateral ties.

* About the next steps after the leaders' meetings, the Indian readout specifically said that "the Special Representatives on the India-China boundary question will meet at an early date...to explore a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the boundary question."

The Chinese readout said the two sides had "agreed on holding talks between their foreign ministers and officials at various levels to bring the relationship back to sound and steady development at an early date".

As such, there is a fair bit of caution in India's strategic circles about the next steps going forward.

The border pact has set a process of trust-building in motion, and if both sides keep their word, it will be at least a couple of years before the entire three-step process of disengagement, de-escalation, and de-induction of troops is completed, and ties return to normal.

Whether it will be a parallel or a sequential process remains to be seen.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

2. Weather forecasts at panchayat level: what will be known, and how it will help

Introduction

Five-day weather forecasts, updated every hour, are now available at the level of gram panchayats — the first major step towards localised forecasting across the country.

The initiative was formally launched by Panchayati Raj Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh and MoS (Independent Charge), Ministry of Science & Technology and Ministry of Earth Sciences, Dr Jitendra Singh.



What is the initiative?

The initiative, Gram Panchayat-Level Weather Forecasting, is a joint program of the Panchayati Raj Ministry, India Meteorological Department (IMD), and the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

According to the Panchayati Raj Ministry, the initiative is aimed at "empowering rural communities and enhancing disaster preparedness at the grassroots, and will benefit farmers and villagers across the country". It will "strengthen grassroots governance and promote sustainable agricultural practices, making rural populations more climate-resilient and better equipped to tackle environmental challenges", the Ministry said.

What will be forecast, and where will the forecasts be available?

Hourly forecasts will be available on the e-GramSwaraj and Gram Manchitra portals, and the Meri Panchayat app. e-GramSwaraj is already operational.

Users can see data on the current temperature, wind speed, cloud cover (in percentage), rainfall, and relative humidity at the level of gram panchayats; five-day forecasts of minimum and maximum temperatures, rainfall, cloud cover, wind direction, and wind speed, and an overall weather forecast.

How will the public benefit from the forecasts?

In the most direct way, this information will help farmers to better plan activities including sowing, irrigation, harvesting, etc.

In a statement, the Panchayati Raj Ministry underlined the importance of microforecasts in the context of intensifying climate change.

“As weather patterns become increasingly unpredictable, the introduction of weather forecasting at the Gram Panchayat level will serve as a crucial tool in safeguarding agricultural livelihoods and enhancing rural preparedness against natural disasters,” the Ministry said.

“Gram Panchayats will receive daily updates on temperature, rainfall, wind speed, and cloud cover, empowering them to make critical decisions in agriculture, such as planning sowing, irrigation, and harvesting activities,” it said.

Why does localised forecasting matter?

The significant advances made in forecasting weather notwithstanding, the science of forecasting has inherent uncertainties.

The more precise a forecast — in terms of the spatial spread or time-window for the event — the greater the uncertainty. Also, the earlier the forecast, the less precise it is likely to be.

It is usually easier to predict large systems that are spread over large geographical areas — such as the Indian monsoon, or a cyclone that develops over the Bay of Bengal, or a heat wave covering several states. But sudden, localised events — like a cloudburst — are more difficult to predict.

Localised weather forecasts can help even small communities of farmers plan their economic activities with greater confidence. There are 2.55 lakh village panchayats across the country, with resident populations of a few thousands on average.

The IMD has developed the system of localised weather forecasting based on gram panchayat boundaries data provided by the Panchayati Raj Ministry.

How accurate are India’s localised weather forecasting capabilities?

As of now, weather forecasting is available at the district and block levels.

Over the years, IMD has worked on focusing its forecasts more and more narrowly. It currently has the ability to forecast weather events over a 12 km x 12 km area, and has been trying out experimental forecasts for 3 km x 3 km grids, with the eventual objective of making hyper-local forecasts for 1 km x 1 km areas.

Localised forecasts are critical to deal with climate change-induced unpredictability in weather systems.

Officials said the Panchayati Raj Ministry is organising a training workshop on “Weather Forecasts at the Gram Panchayat Level”, which will be attended by more than 200 participants,

including elected representatives of panchayati raj institutions and state panchayati raj officials.

The training session will equip panchayat representatives and functionaries with the knowledge and skills to effectively utilise weather forecasting tools and resources at the grassroots level, and thus empower them to make informed decisions and enhance climate resilience in their communities, the officials said.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

3. Union Cabinet approves establishment of Rs.1,000 crore Venture Capital Fund for Space Sector under aegis of IN-SPACe

Introduction

The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved setting up of Rs.1000 crore Venture Capital Fund dedicated to space sector, under aegis of IN-SPACe.

CABINET APPROVES SETTING UP OF VENTURE CAPITAL FUND FOR SPACE SECTOR

Venture Capital Fund (VCF) worth Rs. 1,000 crore will be established

The VCF will be dedicated to space sector, under the aegis of IN-SPACe

The VCF is expected to support around **40 startups**

Benefits:

- Driving economic growth and job creation
- Space technology development
- Retention of space companies domiciled within India
- Increased global competitiveness

Cabinet Decision | 24 October 2024

Financial implications

The deployment period of the proposed Rs.1,000 crore VC fund is planned to be up to five years from the actual date of start of the fund operations. The average deployment amount could be Rs.150-250 crore per year, depending on the investment opportunities and fund requirements.

The indicative range of investment is proposed to be Rs.10-Rs.60 Crore, contingent upon the stage of the company, its growth trajectory, and its potential impact on national space capabilities. Indicative Equity Investment Range could be:

- Growth Stage: Rs.10 Crore – Rs.30 Crore
- Late Growth Stage: Rs.30 Crore – Rs.60 Crore

Based on the above investment range, the fund is expected to support approximately 40 startups.

Background

The Government of India, as part of its 2020 space sector reforms, established IN-SPACe to promote and oversee private sector participation in space activities. IN-SPACe has proposed a Rs.1000 crore Venture Capital Fund to support the growth of India's space, economy, currently valued at \$8.4 billion, with a target to reach \$44 billion by 2033.

The fund aims to address the critical need for risk capital, as traditional lenders are hesitant to fund startups in this high-tech sector. With nearly 250 space startups emerging across the value chain, timely financial support is crucial to ensure their growth and prevent talent loss overseas. The proposed government-backed fund will boost investor confidence, attract private capital, and signal the government's commitment to advancing space reforms. It will serve as an Alternative investment Fund under SEBI regulations, providing early-stage equity to startups and enabling them to scale for further private equity investments.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: PIB

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