CENTRE WEIGHS STEPS TO PILE MORE PRESSURE ON BEIJING

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

India is considering more punitive steps with larger strategic implications to mount pressure on China to vacate territory it has intruded into, even as New Delhi negotiates with Beijing over troop disengagement and de-escalation in Ladakh.

So far, India has implemented a raft of measures such as banning 59 Chinese apps, including the popular TikTok video sharing service, putting embargos on imports of Chinese colour televisions and restricting Chinese investments in areas such as roads and telecom.

In addition, the Chinese language has been removed from the curriculum of Indian schools, and the government is set to review the status of Confucius Institutes, which aim to popularize the language in India. The new measures that could be implemented include "some economic, and some others", said a person familiar with the matter who did not want to be named. A second person familiar with the matter said that one of the steps could be the inclusion of Australia in the Malabar exercises —naval manoeuvres conducted between India and the US from 1992, which Japan joined in 2015.

Australia's inclusion will be seen by China as "militarizing" the "Quad", as the group of four countries is loosely known.

Various options were discussed at a meeting of the Indian government's China Study Group, headed by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and which includes senior officials and military officers. The outcome of the talks were not known.

With China refusing to move out of Indian territory it intruded into in May, New Delhi is expected to unveil measures aimed at increasing the pressure on Beijing.

"The Chinese seem unwilling to restore status quo ante. There has been some disengagement in the Galwan Valley and Hot Springs area. Pangong Tso continues to remain a problem," the second person cited above said.

So far, the two sides have set up a buffer zone separating the troops at Galwan Valley and Hot Springs, but disengagement agreed to at Gogra, a third point, has not happened. There is also no change in the positions occupied by Chinese troops at Finger 4, one of eight mountain spurs jutting into Pangong Tso. Chinese troops continue to retain their positions at the heights, while some of the soldiers deployed at the foot of the mountain have moved back to Finger 5. India holds up to Finger 4 and used to patrol up to Finger 8, given that New Delhi perceives the Line of Actual Control border to be at Finger 8. China held up to Finger 8 till April, but has advanced to Finger 4 and is refusing to budge.

Srikanth Kondapalli, a professor of Chinese Studies at the New Delhi-based Jawaharlal Nehru University, recalled that in the aftermath of the 15 June Galwan Valley clash in which 20 Indian army personnel were killed, foreign minister S. Jaishankar had warned of serious consequences to the bilateral relationship. Any further steps India would take would flow from this statement, he said.

Last week, Chinese ambassador to India, Sun Weidong, had stressed that China was not a

strategic threat to India though the ambassador had also said that China was not inside Indian territory and blamed Indian troops for the Galwan incident. "This shows that China wants to insulate the larger economic and people-to-people relationship from the border issues while they change the status quo on the ground," said the second person cited above.

The person said India has made it clear that peace on the border is the basis for bilateral ties remaining on track. "This is something we are clear about," the person added.

Click here to read the Mint ePaperLivemint.com is now on Telegram. Join Livemint channel in your Telegram and stay updated

Log in to our website to save your bookmarks. It'll just take a moment.

Your session has expired, please login again.

You are now subscribed to our newsletters. In case you can't find any email from our side, please check the spam folder.

END