

ARE BORDER DEVELOPMENT WORKS DRIVING INDIA-CHINA CONFLICT?

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

The government is building roads and physical infra in border districts at a brisk pace. But social infra in border areas is still lacking.

In 2006, the government of India asked the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) to lay down 61 roads, measuring 3,324 km, along its border with China by 2012. That date came and went. By March 2015, only 625 km was done. Work crawled and unfinished roads persisted.

In March 2018, the figure crept up to 981 km. But the two years since 2018 have been dramatically different. By March 2020, the figure on finished roads had shot up to 2,486 km, with major gains in Jammu & Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh, shows data culled from reports presented in the parliament.

In the past few years, both India and China have been building—roads, bridges, tunnels, posts—along their border, termed the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The fatal clashes between the two militaries in Ladakh's Galwan Valley in June was preceded by bouts of building on both sides along the LAC.

For India, the LAC runs along 16 districts across one union territory (Ladakh) and four states (Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh). Data compiled from multiple sources shows India is adding various infrastructure and facilities in these 16 districts. The same data also suggests that while such asset creation might be adding to India's strategic capital, it is not furthering its human capital the same way.

Given the mostly hilly terrain, roads are the starting point of much of this building activity, as they enable movement of people and equipment. The above-mentioned Indo-China border roads (ICBR) project is one such venture. It is intended to "facilitate effective border management, security and development of infrastructure in inaccessible areas adjoining the China border". After stuttering in its initial years, the ICBR project is now three-fourths in length, and is slated for completion in 2022.

Another Central initiative with a border focus is the Border Area Development Programme (BADP), under the ministry of home affairs. Launched during the seventh five-year plan (1985-90), the BADP "aims to meet the special development needs of people living in remote and inaccessible areas situated near the international border" and provide "essential infrastructure through convergence of Central/state/BADP/local schemes and participatory approach".

At present, it covers 111 border districts in 16 states and 2 union territories. As per BADP guidelines 2020, for 8 north-eastern states, 2 Himalayan states and the union territory of Jammu & Kashmir, the Centre provides 90% of funding, with the states/UTs providing the balance 10%. For Ladakh, the Centre's share is 100%. For the remaining six border states (such as Punjab and Rajasthan), the Centre-state funding breakup is 60:40.

In the first few years of the Union government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BADP allocations rose, but have declined since then. For 2020-21, Arunachal Pradesh and the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir each received 12% of the total 705 crore. Overall, the 2020-21 figure is 36% below the high of 2017-18.

The per-district BADP allocation is modest. For example, the BADP action plan for 2019-20 of Leh (Ladakh) shows it received 7.3 crore that year towards funding 130 ongoing projects worth 95 crore. Of this total project cost, 70% is for infrastructure projects (roads, vehicle bridges, installation of hand pumps, etc). Agriculture accounts for 15%, while social sector schemes including health and education account for about 10%.

The big spends come not from BADP, but from universal schemes and projects. Take the rural roads programme, the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY). Between 2016 and 2020, the 16 LAC districts have seen a cumulative addition of 9,494 km, an increase of 109%—more than thrice the all-India increase of 32% during the same period. Nine of the 16 districts bettered their state averages.

Unlike rural roads, time series data is not available for other infrastructure sectors. But some pieces of evidence suggests improved activity in recent years. For example, data from the department of economic affairs shows 57 hydel power units in public-private partnership mode in the works in the nine LAC districts in Arunachal Pradesh, 3 in Chamoli in Uttarakhand and 2 in North Sikkim.

In spite of such building activity, border districts don't appear to offer their residents much by way of opportunities. For example, between 2011 and 2016-17, 15 of these 16 districts registered a decline in total students in schools. That extended to all 16 districts between 2016-17 and 2018-19, shows data from the ministry of human resource development.

For Leh, and districts in Himachal and Sikkim, this can be partly explained by a drop in population aged 5-17 years (school-going years) between 2001 and 2011, as per Census data. But for Arunachal, the decline in school-going numbers comes in spite of a 20% increase in the 5-17 year population. In Arunachal, in 2018-19, only 47% students transited from secondary school to senior secondary school, against the all-India figure of 68%. For other states in this analysis, this figure ranged from 74% to 83%.

Similarly, data from the health ministry on government healthcare facilities shows a decline in the number of facilities in 4 LAC districts and a status quo in 6 LAC districts between 2016-17 and 2019-20. India might be securing its borders, but the nature of engagement it is crafting with the people there still leaves a lot to be desired.

howindialives.com is a search engine for public data

[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

crackIAS.com