

NOT POSSIBLE TO DEMILITARISE SIACHEN

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We are “not averse” to demilitarisation of the Siachen glacier but the pre-condition is Pakistan has to accept the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL), Army chief General Manoj Naravane said on Wednesday, raising a fresh debate over the world’s highest battlefield, with experts saying it may not be ideal in the backdrop of the stand-off in eastern Ladakh and the Chinese build-up.

In contrast to the present comments, the Army chief had two years ago termed Siachen as a point of “collusive threat” between Pakistan and China and so “we should keep control”. However, with the stand-off in eastern Ladakh and massive build-up and expansion by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in sub-sector north which is very close to the Karakoram range and Soltoro ridge, several serving officials and experts noted that it would not be possible for India to vacate the crucial positions on the glacier.

At the annual press conference, Gen. Naravane said, “Pakistan has to accept what are their positions and has to accept what are our positions.”

He said the situation had occurred due to a unilateral attempt by Pakistan to change the status quo. The Line of Control (LoC) had been delineated to a point called NJ 9842, and thereafter, the understanding was that it will remain unoccupied. But Pakistan had made an attempt to occupy territory and “we were forced to take our countermeasures”, Gen. Naravane said.

Siachen and Sir Creek have long been termed “low hanging fruits” in the past for resolution between India and Pakistan and the two countries have held 13 rounds of Defence Secretary-level talks on Siachen, the last one in June 2012.

Former Northern Army Commander Lt. Gen. D.S. Hooda said the Indian Army has not been averse to a disengagement at Siachen but it has not happened due to a reluctance by the Pakistan Army to accept the positions that are occupied by the Indian Army.

“Now the situation has completely changed with the PLA aggression in the sub sector north in eastern Ladakh. With the Siachen sector facing threats from both west and east, there is perhaps no question of any disengagement from Siachen,” he told *The Hindu* .

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