

DEAL ON GOGRA, HOT SPRINGS LIKELY SOON

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India and China are set to hold the 12th round of Corps Commander-level talks aimed at resolving the stand-off in eastern Ladakh soon, and an agreement for disengagement at Gogra and Hot Springs is likely to be reached.

China had suggested July 26 as a possible date for the talks, but the Indian side conveyed that the day being Kargil Vijay Diwas, it would not be convenient. Fresh dates are expected to be agreed upon soon.

“The situation on the ground is stable. There have been no attempts to reoccupy the peaks vacated. The sense is they (China) are ready to disengage from all places. We got positive inputs and it will happen,” a senior defence official said. “We continue to talk at all levels.”

The two sides are also looking at a Major General-level talks to be held after the 12th round of talks, a second official said. Since the stand-off began, the two sides have held 10 Major General-level talks, 55 Brigadier-level talks and around 1,450 calls over the two hotlines. India and China have two hotlines for communication at Chushul and Daulat Beg Oldi.

Friction points

While disengagement was completed on both banks of Pangong Tso in February, the other friction points that remain to be resolved are Gogra and Hot Springs, Demchok and Depsang. The buffer zones established in some places as part of earlier talks remain in place. “Buffer zone varies from place to place,” the first official said.

In eastern Ladakh, India and China have two mutually agreed disputed areas — Trig Heights and Demchok — and 10 areas of differing perception. Officials said since the stand-off last year, additional five friction points have emerged. These are Km 120 in the Galwan area, Patrolling Points 15 and 17, and Rechin La and Rezang La on the south Bank of the Pangong Tso, the second official said.

“China wants de-escalation first and disengagement later which is not acceptable to India as they can bring back troops and equipment much faster than we can do,” the second official said. Some of the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) peace locations are located as far as 3,000 km from the LAC, but they can mobilise much faster, the official said.

Access issues

For India, the area is cut off for several months a year which is not the case with China. Both the Zoji La and Rohtang passes were kept open longer than usual last year due to the stand-off and are available for seven or eight months. Construction work on several tunnels is under way on a priority basis, including at Baralacha La and Tanglang La, among others, the officials said.

Stating that they have a clear picture of what the PLA is doing and they have vacated and gone back in some places, the official said China has not increased its troop levels since the stand-off began but has rotated its troops. The PLA, too, is closely watching the movements of the Indian military. “We have about 1,000 vehicles going up and down the Rohtang axis everyday,” the official added.

However, at least two officials said the Line of Actual Control (LAC) will not become like the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan with very close deployments by both sides. "The LAC will not become like the LoC. But the force levels have gone up as the trust is lost. All agreements are broken," the first official stated. New protocols have to be worked out, another official stated

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