

EASTERN LADAKH STANDOFF: INDIAN AND CHINESE ARMIES HOLD LT-GENERAL-LEVEL TALKS

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Indian and Chinese armies on Saturday held Lieutenant General-level talks in their first major attempt to resolve the month-long border standoff in eastern Ladakh, official sources said.

The Indian delegation was led by Lt General Harinder Singh, the general officer commanding of Leh-based 14 Corps, while the Chinese side was headed by the Commander of the Tibet Military District, government sources said.

The talks were held at the Border Personnel Meeting Point in Maldo on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh.

Without specifically mentioning the talks, an Indian Army spokesperson said: "Indian and Chinese officials continue to remain engaged through the established military and diplomatic channels to address the current situation in the India-China border areas."

Saturday's meeting took place after 12 rounds of talks between local commanders of the two armies and three rounds of discussions at the level of major general-rank officials could not produce any tangible outcome, the sources said.

The high-level military dialogue took place a day after the two countries held diplomatic talks during which both sides agreed to handle their "differences" through peaceful discussions while respecting each other's sensitivities and concerns.

Earlier, sources had said the Indian delegation at the military talks will press for restoration of status quo ante in Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso and Gogra in eastern Ladakh, oppose huge build up of Chinese troops in the region and ask China not to resist development of infrastructure by India on its side of the de-facto border.

After the standoff began early last month, Indian military leadership decided that Indian troops will adopt a firm approach in dealing with the aggressive posturing by the Chinese troops in all disputed areas of Pangong Tso, Galwan Valley, Demchok and Daulat Beg Oldie.

The Chinese army is learnt to have deployed around 2,500 troops in Pangong Tso and Galwan Valley besides gradually enhancing temporary infrastructure and weaponry.

The sources said satellite images have captured significant ramping up of defence infrastructure by China on its side of the LAC, the de-facto border, including upgrading a military airbase around 180 km from the Pangong Tso area.

The Chinese Army has been gradually ramping up its strategic reserves in its rear bases near the the LAC by rushing in artillery guns, infantry combat vehicles and heavy military equipment, they said.

China has also enhanced its presence in certain areas along the LAC in Northern Sikkim and

Uttarakhand following which India has also been increasing its presence by sending additional troops, they said.

The trigger for the face-off was China's stiff opposition to India laying a key road in the Finger area around the Pangong Tso Lake besides construction of another road connecting the Darbuk-Shayok-Daulat Beg Oldie road in Galwan Valley.

The road in the Finger area in Pangong Tso is considered crucial for India to carry out patrol. India has already decided not to stall any border infrastructure projects in eastern Ladakh in view of Chinese protests.

The situation in eastern Ladakh deteriorated after around 250 Chinese and Indian soldiers were engaged in a violent face-off on May 5 and 6. The incident in Pangong Tso was followed by a similar incident in north Sikkim on May 9.

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