

BACK FROM THE BRINK: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA-CHINA BORDER ROW

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

An agreement reached between India and China on June 6 for a [partial disengagement of troops](#) from some of the points of stand-off along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) is a step in the right direction. It is, however, just the first step. Both sides face what is likely to be a long road ahead to [restore the status quo ante](#) prior to [China's multiple incursions](#) that began one month ago. On June 9, Indian Army sources [presented a measured appraisal](#) of what had been agreed to at the Corps Commander-level talks, as well as of the challenges that remain. Both sides identified five locations of conflict in the western sector in Ladakh — a separate ongoing stand-off in Naku La in Sikkim was not on the agenda. The five spots include Patrolling Points 14, 15 and 17, Chushul, and the north bank of Pangong Lake. A broad plan has been agreed to hold a series of talks at lower ranks of Colonel, Brigadier, and Major General at four of those points in the coming week to take forward the disengagement process. There, however, appear to be serious differences on Pangong Lake, which may require another round of higher level talks at the Corps Commander level. Chinese troops have dug in at the Finger 4 area on the lake's northern bank, and still remain present on India's side of the LAC, which runs at Finger 8. The Fingers 1 to 8, running from west to east, refer to mountain spurs on the north bank. By erecting tents, China has unilaterally changed the status quo.

India has made clear it will accept nothing less than restoring the status quo ante, and will not dilute its build-up in the area until and unless China draws down the artillery, bombers, rocket forces, air defence radars and jammers that it has amassed behind the frontlines on its side of the LAC. The demands made at ground-level talks suggest China's moves may, in part, be motivated by its insecurities at India's recent improvements in infrastructure on the Indian side of the LAC, which have helped reduce the enormous asymmetry that China has enjoyed, and now wants to preserve. India has correctly made clear it will not stop construction activity on its side of the LAC, which it is entirely entitled to. One important takeaway from the June 6 talks that could have a long-lasting impact is a proposal that the Corps Commanders have formal meetings once or twice a year for better interaction between the two armies at a higher level. If there is one thing that the recent tensions have made clear, it is the urgent need for better communication to address the strategic mistrust that prevails on both sides of the LAC. China's actions over the past month, have, unfortunately, only deepened it. Ill-advised posturing at the top political levels of the Indian leadership with threats last year to reclaim Aksai Chin didn't help either. Both sides must now look ahead at what can be done, with lessons from the mistakes of the recent past.

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