

CHINA LAYS CLAIM TO ENTIRE GALWAN VALLEY

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Monday's clash was reported to have taken place on India's side of the LAC.

India's constructions, including a bridge across the river that was completed on Friday and is thought to be one of the triggers for the recent clash, are on India's side of the LAC, in an area in between the Galwan-Shyok confluence and the line.

While most Chinese maps show almost all of the Galwan river within Chinese territory, the western edge of the river where it meets the Shyok River has not previously been shown as Chinese territory previously in most maps.

By now staking a claim to the entire valley and up to the confluence of the rivers — including on land where India has carried out construction work — Indian officials said China had expanded its claims and was seeking to alter the LAC.

While the LAC has not been demarcated and there are differing perceptions in more than a dozen locations along the LAC, this has not been a point of contention previously in the Galwan area, they said.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry's statement said: "For many years, Chinese border guards have been patrolling and performing their duties here. Since April this year, the Indian border defence forces have unilaterally continued to build roads, bridges and other facilities in the Galwan Valley region. China has repeatedly made representations and protests on this, but the Indian side has intensified cross-border troubles."

The statement revealed China sought a commitment from India to "not cross the Galwan estuary to patrol and build facilities", underlining its claims up to the confluence.

The statement claimed that in the early hours of May 6, Indian border guards "crossed the line into the Chinese territory in the Galwan Valley area by night, constructing construction barriers, blocking the normal patrol of the Chinese border guards, deliberately provoking incidents, and attempting to unilaterally change the status of border control." It said that "at the strong request of the Chinese side" India had "agreed and evacuated the personnel and facilities beyond the line".

The statement claimed that at the June 6 Corps Commander-level talks, India "promised not to cross the Galwan Estuary to patrol and build facilities, and the two sides agreed to withdraw the troops in batches through a meeting of local commanders." It repeated China's statement from earlier this week that blamed India for the June 15 violence.

On Friday, a Chinese strategic expert cited "historical rights" going back to the Qing Dynasty to claim the entire valley.

"Multiple accounts from the Qing Dynasty [1644-1911] and Western literature have recorded that the Galwan Valley was China's territory. Based on the principle of 'historic rights,' China has jurisdiction over the valley area," Zhang Yongpan, a research fellow of the Institute of Chinese Borderland Studies at CASS, told the *Global Times*.

He referred to India's construction activity near the Shyok river as reflecting an attempt "to break

into Chinese land”.

“In nearby Shyok River in west Galwan River, India built an airport, constructed bridges, roads and villages. For years, the country has been seeking to break into Chinese land,” he said.

“Chinese maps that I have seen show almost all of the Galwan River as lying within the territory China claims in the area,” M. Taylor Fravel, an expert on the Chinese military at MIT, told *The Hindu* earlier.

“The one discrepancy would be the western tip of the Galwan River as it meets the Shyok River. Here, the last few kilometres of the Galwan River are often depicted as lying beyond China’s border. How one defines the parameters of the valley itself might be different than the river, however.”

While there was some ambiguity on where the extremities of the valley may be defined, the new statements from China suggest their claim goes up to the confluence of the rivers.

China’s new claims, observers said, may have been triggered by last year’s opening of the vital Darbuk-Shyok-Daulet Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road, that runs parallel to the LAC providing key all-weather access to the post at Daulet Beg Oldie, one of the northernmost points in Ladakh.

China may also be seeking access to areas closer to the confluence, from where it could neutralise the strategically important DSDBO road.

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