

# KEEPING THE PEACE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA-CHINA BORDER TENSION

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

With four [incidents along the Line of Actual Control](#) (LAC) in recent weeks, the India-China border is witnessing the highest tensions since the [Doklam stand-off in 2017](#). In the three years since, both sides have done remarkably well to keep the peace. Prime Minister Modi and President Xi both agreed differences should not be allowed to escalate into disputes. Also, a clear message was sent to the two militaries to abide by the detailed protocols already in place, such as those agreed to in 2005 and 2013. These regulate the activities of troops in the contested zones that lie in between both sides' overlapping claim lines of the undefined LAC. If Army Chief General Manoj Naravane wisely sought to cool the temperatures with his [May 14 statement](#), China has unhelpfully raised them. On May 19, its Foreign Ministry [accused the Indian Army](#) of "attempting to unilaterally change the status" of the LAC. The stand-off in Ladakh appears to have been triggered by China moving in troops to obstruct road construction activity by India. Last year, India completed the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulet Beg Oldi (DBO) road which connects Leh to the Karakoram Pass. India also maintains a key landing strip at DBO at 16,000 feet. The broader context for the tensions is the changing dynamic along the LAC. India has been upgrading its roads as it plays catch-up, with China already enjoying an advantage in both terrain and infrastructure. China now seems to be telling India it has no right to carry out the kind of activity that Beijing has already done. India is well within its right to carry out construction work. Delhi needs to remind Beijing that a fundamental principle that underpins all previous agreements is recognising the right to mutual and equal security of the two sides.

The immediate priority is for both sides to use existing channels and step back. Flag meetings between brigade commanders have so far been unable to break the stalemate. The incidents have underlined how the new LAC situation is placing existing mechanisms under renewed stress. India and China should grasp the current situation as an opportunity to revive the stalled process of clarifying the LAC. China has resisted this as a distraction to the boundary negotiations. But rather than agree on a line, both can instead simply seek to better understand the claims of the other and reach a common understanding to regulate activity in these areas. Clarifying the LAC may even provide a fresh impetus to the stalled boundary talks between the Special Representatives. Beyond the posturing, both sides know a final settlement will ultimately have to use the LAC as a basis, with only minor adjustments. Only a settlement will end the shadow boxing on the LAC. With both countries in the midst of an unprecedented global pandemic, the time to push for a settlement to a distracting, protracted dispute is now.

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