

## More Chinese boots near Doklam

Worry remains:Kupup in Sikkim, the closest point to the Doklam plateau.Special Arrangement

A conclave of Army Commanders next week is set to discuss military preparedness along the China border, amid indications that the Chinese may have beefed up their presence near the Doklam standoff site since the disengagement more than a month ago.

According to sources in the Indian security establishment, the Chinese have 1,500 to 1,700 troops of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) stationed a few hundred metres afrom the standoff site on their side.

### New bunkers found

In the locality, Indian surveillance has also detected new bunkers. The sources said road construction stores that were moved to the area during the Doklam standoff also remain in the area, and some road re-laying has been done on the Chinese side not very far from the standoff point.

At least a couple of official sources admitted that they were uncomfortable about the Chinese presence and activities on the plateau. "It is not status quo ante," an official said. "Ideally, they should withdraw the troops and equipment," he said.

Defence Ministry officials here claimed that there were only some 300 Chinese soldiers in the area. "There has been no change in the levels (of deployment) since the end of the standoff. Since then, the Chinese troops have only pulled back 300-400 metres," a senior Army officer said.

The nearest PLA base is at Yatung which has a battalion headquarters with at least 600 soldiers, and is 12-13 km away.

### Tanks deployed

Meanwhile, Army sources confirmed that the biannual Army Commanders conference, scheduled to be held from October 9 to 14, would be discussing the Chinese posturing and military preparedness along the border.

The Indian Army has carried out its own readjustments in the India-China-Bhutan trijunction, with forward deployment of T-72 tanks and BrahMos missiles among other equipment.

The two Armies were engaged in a standoff at Doklam near the trijunction since June 16 after Indian soldiers prevented the Chinese from building a road in the disputed territory. After prolonged diplomatic negotiations, the two sides announced disengagement on August 28 ending the 73-day standoff.

Officials said the present posturing by the PLA could be in the context of the crucial Chinese Communist Party Congress scheduled in two weeks. "It is more of a messaging by the PLA for the party. They may pull back after that," the MoD official said.

"They would not want to wait till winter. It will be difficult to sustain for them," the official added.

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