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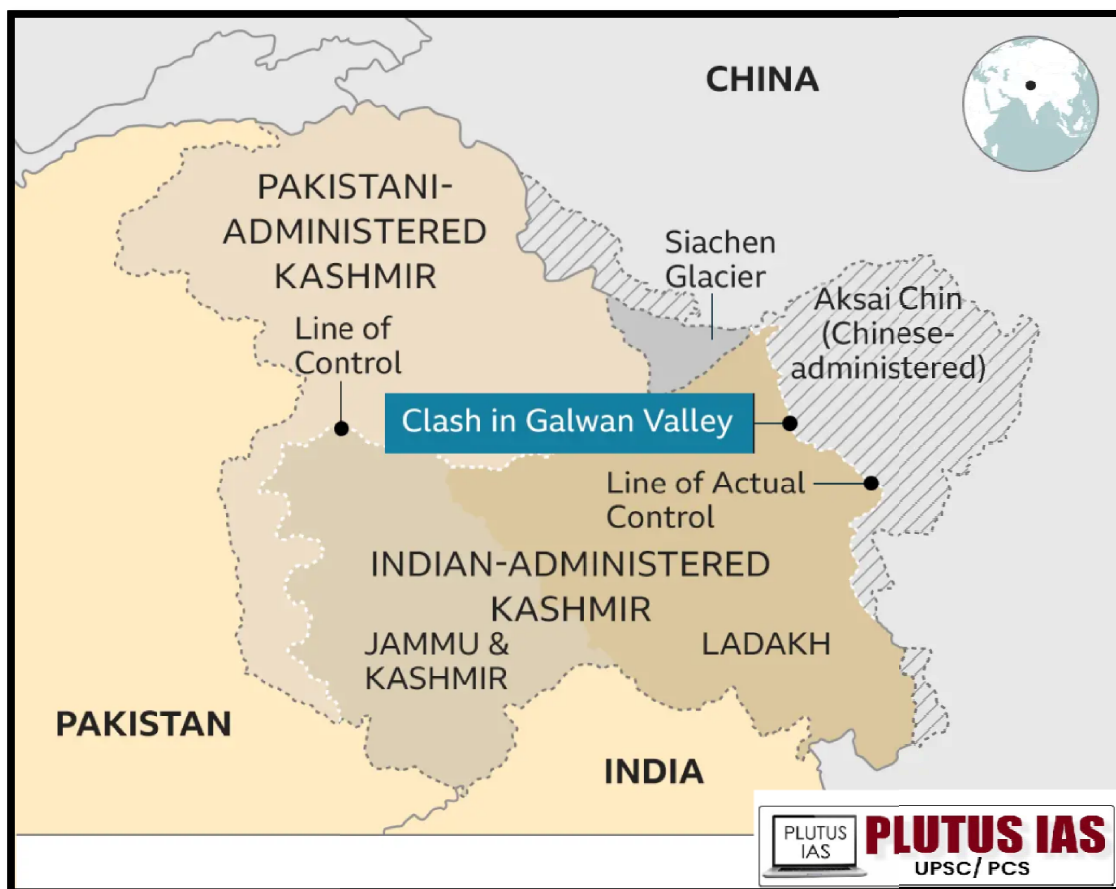
A LINE IN THE SAND: UNDERSTANDING THE INDIA-CHINA BORDER CONFLICT

WHY IN THE NEWS?

India and China will undertake “coordinated patrolling” in Depsang and Demchok along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh to avoid face-offs, as disengagement in both areas. They added that the patrols were set to resume by the “month-end”.

Evolution of India-China Bilateral Ties (1950-1970 and 2000-2020)

- 1. 1950:** Diplomatic relations were established on April 1; India first non-socialist country to recognize the People’s Republic of China. Catchphrase: “Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai.”
- 2. 1955:** Both countries attended the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, promoting solidarity and cooperation and contributing to decolonization and the Non-Aligned Movement.
- 3. 1962:** Border conflict leads to a serious setback in bilateral relations.
- 4. 1976:** Restoration of ambassadorial relations; gradual improvement in ties.
- 5. 1988:** Indian PM Rajiv Gandhi’s visit initiates normalization, focusing on developing relations and resolving boundary issues.
- 6. 1992:** President R. Venkataraman visits China, the first Indian President to do so post-independence.
- 7. 1996:** Chinese President Jiang Zemin visits India; confidence-building measures in the military field signed.
- 8. 2000:** President K. R. Narayanan visits China for the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties.
- 9. 2008:** Agreement on “A Shared Vision for the 21st Century.”
- 10. 2010:** 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties; joint communiqué issued.
- 10. 2011:** “China-India Exchange Year” with cultural activities and a joint encyclopedia project.
- 11. 2012:** Designated “Year of China-India Friendship and Cooperation”; leaders meet during BRICS Summit.
- 12. 2015:** Meetings on the sidelines of BRICS and East Asia Cooperation Summits; Nathu La Pass opened for Indian pilgrims.
- 13. 2018:** Informal meeting in Wuhan establishes a new model for leader exchanges; meetings during SCO and G20 Summits.
- 14. 2019:** Second informal meeting in Mamallapuram; reaffirmation of the Wuhan consensus and commitment to closer partnership.
- 15. 2020:** Celebrates 70 years of diplomatic relations; Year of Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges with 70 celebratory activities planned



INDIA-CHINA DEEP ENTANGLEMENT:

1. Economic Relations

Trade Volume: India and China have significant trade ties, with China being one of India's largest trading partners. However, the trade imbalance remains a concern for India.

Dependency Issues: India's reliance on Chinese imports, particularly in electronics and pharmaceuticals, raises strategic concerns about dependency.

2. Cultural Exchange

Cultural Ties: Historical and cultural connections exist, with initiatives promoting tourism, art, and educational exchanges.

Soft Power: Both nations use cultural diplomacy to enhance their global image, though cultural differences can also lead to misunderstandings.

3. Regional Forums

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): Both countries are members, focusing on security and economic cooperation in Central Asia, but differing priorities can lead to friction.

BRICS: India and China collaborate within BRICS to address global challenges, although competition in areas like economic influence often surfaces.

Russia-India-China (RIC): This trilateral forum addresses geopolitical issues, promoting multipolarity, but diverging interests can complicate cooperation.

4. Border Issues

Ongoing Disputes: The unresolved border conflict remains a significant point of tension, with periodic military standoffs and negotiations failing to yield lasting solutions.

Strategic Implications: Border tensions impact regional security dynamics, affecting both countries' defence postures and alliances.

5. Science and Technology

Collaboration Opportunities: There are areas for potential collaboration in technology and innovation, particularly in fields like space exploration and renewable energy.

Competition: Simultaneously, both nations are competing in high-tech industries, which can exacerbate tensions.

6. Climate Change

Common Challenges: Both countries face similar climate challenges and have opportunities for collaboration in sustainable development and renewable energy initiatives.

Global Responsibility: As major polluters, India and China are under international scrutiny to fulfil commitments under climate agreements, impacting their bilateral dynamics.

7. WTO Platform

Trade Relations: Both nations engage in discussions within the World Trade Organization (WTO) regarding trade policies and practices.

Common Interests: They often align on issues such as agricultural subsidies and trade reforms, although competition can lead to conflicting positions.

IRRITANT IN BILATERAL RELATIONS:

1. Border Conflicts

Galwan Valley Incident (2020): A violent clash resulted in significant casualties, marking a severe escalation in tensions.

Standoff at Depsang Plains (2013): A prolonged standoff highlighted unresolved border issues and lack of trust.

Doklam Standoff (2018): Tensions flared over Chinese infrastructure development near a disputed tri-junction, leading to military confrontations.

2. China's Expansionist Policies

Tibet Autonomy: China's tight control over Tibet and repression of Tibetan culture create concerns for India regarding regional stability and autonomy.

3. Geographical Challenges

Brahmaputra River: Chinese dam projects on the Brahmaputra raise fears about water security and potential impacts on downstream states, particularly in India's northeast.

4. Regional Power Dynamics

Asian Giants: India and China are engaged in a regional power struggle, shaping the geopolitical landscape in Asia.

Support for Pakistan: China's strategic alliance with Pakistan, including military and economic assistance, is viewed by India as a direct threat.

5. Economic Frictions

Trade Deficit: India has a significant trade deficit with China, raising concerns about economic dependency.

Predatory Pricing and Dumping: Allegations of unfair trade practices, including dumping of goods, create economic tensions.

Restrictions on Services: Non-tariff barriers in China limit Indian service exports, compounding trade imbalances.

6. Indo-Pacific Dynamics

Quad Alliance: India's involvement in the Quad (with the U.S., Japan, and Australia) is seen by China as a strategy to contain its influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

WAY FORWARD:

1. Diplomacy and Dialogue

Mutual Respect: Both nations should prioritize respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity to rebuild trust.

Disagreement Resolution Through Dialogue: Establishing regular diplomatic channels for open discussions on contentious issues, including border disputes, can help prevent misunderstandings and conflicts.

2. Economic Cooperation

Opening Economies: Promoting trade and investment by reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers can enhance economic ties and reduce trade imbalances.

Fair Trade Practices: Both countries should commit to fair trade practices, addressing issues like predatory pricing and dumping to foster a more equitable economic relationship.

3. Climate Change Collaboration

Joint Initiatives: Collaborating on climate change through joint research and development of renewable energy technologies can position both countries as leaders in global sustainability efforts.

Shared Goals: Aligning international climate agreements and commitments can enhance cooperation and demonstrate a united front in addressing global challenges.

4. Science and Technology

Cooperative Projects: Encouraging partnerships in scientific research and technological innovation can benefit both nations, particularly in areas like health, agriculture, and clean energy.

Exchange Programs: Promoting academic and research exchanges can facilitate knowledge transfer and strengthen ties in the science and technology sector.

CONCLUSION:

The relationship between India and China is characterized by a complex interplay of cooperation and competition, shaped by historical ties, economic interdependence, and ongoing tensions. The recent decision to undertake coordinated patrolling in Depsang and Demchok reflects an effort to manage border disputes and prevent face-offs, signalling a commitment to diplomacy despite past conflicts. Moving forward, both nations must prioritize dialogue and mutual respect to resolve outstanding issues, particularly concerning border disputes. Economic cooperation is crucial; by promoting fair trade practices and reducing barriers, India and China can address trade imbalances and enhance mutual prosperity.

PRELIMS QUESTION:

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the India-China relationship:

1. India and China are based on the Panchsheel principles.
2. India and China are both members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
3. China has been the largest trade partner of India in the last five years.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Answer: A

MAINS QUESTION:

Q. Discuss the challenges posed by border disputes in India-China relations. How can sustained dialogue and negotiation frameworks help in resolving these conflicts?

(250 words, 15 marks)

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UPSC CSE Interview of 2020

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