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Home / India / China, Bhutan agree to move forward on roadmap for their boundary talks

# China, Bhutan agree to move forward on roadmap for their boundary talks

The three-step roadmap has still not been made public. Talks between China and Bhutan since 1984 have largely been on contested areas in Bhutan's west including Doklam and in the north along their 477-km-long border.

By: **Express News Service**

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Doklam is near India's Siliguri corridor and was the site of a long standoff between Indian and Chinese

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Fifteen months after they signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on a three-step roadmap to expedite their boundary negotiations, China and Bhutan have announced that a “positive consensus” has been reached to “simultaneously push forward the implementation of all steps” of the roadmap.

The three-step roadmap has still not been made public. Talks between China and Bhutan since 1984 have largely been on contested areas in Bhutan’s west including Doklam and in the north along their 477-km-long border.

In 2020, China laid claim to the Sakteng wildlife sanctuary in Bhutan’s east near the border with Arunachal Pradesh. In the mid-1990s, China had proposed a territorial swap, seeking Doklam and other enclaves in Bhutan’s west in exchange for areas in the north. The two countries do not have diplomatic ties.

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Doklam is near India’s Siliguri corridor and was the site of a long standoff between Indian and Chinese troops in 2017.

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Any development in the China-Bhutan boundary negotiations will be keenly watched by India. Earlier this week, Army chief General Manoj Pande said the Army is closely watching the situation in Doklam and monitoring Chinese activities there.

**INDIA WILL monitor any move to take forward the China-Bhutan talks. It views Chinese presence near Doklam as a major security concern close to the strategic Siliguri corridor. China has also staked claim to a wildlife sanctuary in Bhutan near the border with Arunachal.**

In a joint statement, China and Bhutan said the 11th Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the China-Bhutan Boundary Issues was held in the Chinese city of Kunming from January 10 to 13.

At the meeting, the two sides, “in a frank, cordial and constructive atmosphere, had an in-depth exchange of views on implementing the MoU on the Three-Step Roadmap for Expediting the China-Bhutan Boundary Negotiations, and reached a positive consensus.”

“The two sides agreed to simultaneously push forward the implementation of all the steps of the Three-Step Roadmap,” it said, adding that the two sides also agreed to increase the frequency of the EGMs and to “keep contact through diplomatic channels on holding the 25th Round of China-Bhutan Boundary talks as soon as possible at mutually convenient dates”.

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“In a show of goodwill and friendship, the Chinese government had donated a batch of supplies to Bhutan, and the Bhutanese side expressed appreciation. The two sides held a brief handover ceremony during the meeting,” the statement said.

The Chinese delegation at the Kunming EGM talks was led by Hong Liang, Director-General of the Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, while the Bhutanese delegation was led by Dasho Letho Tobdhen Tangbi, Secretary of the International Boundaries of Bhutan.

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