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India-China LAC Agreement: What this means, why experts are advising caution

India has announced a pact on patrolling along the LAC, which is expected to set in motion the process ultimately leading to normalisation. However, Indian strategic circles are cautious about the next steps.

Written by [Shubhajit Roy](#) Follow

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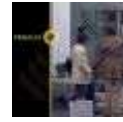
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Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Kazan. (AP Photo)

Indian and Chinese negotiators have **arrived at an agreement on “patrolling arrangements”** along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), leading to disengagement and a resolution of the issues that had arisen in these areas in 2020, India has said.

This announcement on Monday was followed by a bilateral meeting on Wednesday between Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) and China’s President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS leaders’ summit in Kazan, Russia.

Significantly, Chinese statements through this week have not referred to the agreement on patrolling.

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Road to agreement

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* In April 2024, Prime Minister Modi told Newsweek magazine that “For India, the relationship with China is important and significant”, and “It is my belief that we need to urgently address the prolonged situation on our borders so that the abnormality in our bilateral interactions can be put behind us.”

* The Chinese government reacted positively to Modi’s remarks. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that the relationship between India and China was “about more than the boundary situation” — and that “China and India maintain close communication through diplomatic and military channels on handling issues related to the border situation and have made positive progress”.

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* In May, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, in an interview to PTI, expressed hope for the resolution of the remaining issues with China amid the border standoff in Ladakh. Importantly, he said that the outstanding issues primarily revolve around “patrolling rights” and “patrolling abilities”.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi with President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin at the BRICS summit in Kazan on Wednesday. (Image: Reuters)

Question of patrolling

The patrolling pact announced by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Monday is the key pillar of the agreement.

Patrolling is one of the key elements of border management between India and China. Since there is no physical line on the ground that corresponds to maps, Indian troops are expected to go up to the Indian perception of the border before returning to base.

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Typically, soldiers either walk or drive up to the patrolling points and leave behind a sign of their presence there. This could be anything Indian — perhaps an empty packet of cigarettes or a matchbox made in India.



Eastern Ladakh

Article 4 of the 2005 border pact codifies the conduct of the troops in case of a face-off. Some of the stipulated guidelines are as follows:

* If the border personnel of the two sides come to a face-to-face situation due to differences in the alignment of the LAC or any other reason, they shall exercise self-restraint and take all necessary steps to avoid an escalation of the situation.

* Throughout the face-to-face situation, neither side shall use force or threaten to use force against the other.

* Both sides shall treat each other with courtesy and refrain from any provocative actions.

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* Neither side shall put up marks or signs on the spots.

Contours of agreement

It is learnt that the two sides have agreed to restore patrolling rights to each other in the Depsang Plains and Demchok region — these are areas where the problems are called legacy issues, predating the 2020 Chinese incursions. This means that Indian troops can patrol up to patrolling point (PP) 10 to 13 in the Depsang Plains, and in Charding nullah of Demchok.

The agreement on patrolling arrangements is expected to lead to disengagement, de-escalation and de-militarisation in areas where 50,000 to 60,000 troops are stationed on each side. Officials have said this process is expected to begin in the next week to 10 days.

In press conferences held this week, the Foreign Secretary has shared details of the

pact on “patrolling arrangements”.

* In Demchok and Depsang, patrolling and grazing activities will resume as pre-May 2020. “...In the pending areas under discussion, patrolling and independent grazing activities, wherever applicable, will revert to the situation as it obtained in 2020,” Misri said in Kazan on Tuesday.

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* The previous disengagement at friction points such as Galwan Valley, north and south banks of Pangong Tso, Gogra-Hot Springs area have not been reopened for negotiations.

* Misri said he hoped the arrangements can “prevent the kind of clashes that occurred earlier in some areas near the LAC”, referring to the Galwan clashes of 2020, in which 20 Indian troops including a Colonel-rank officer and at least four Chinese soldiers were killed. He stressed on close monitoring so that the clashes don’t recur.

* He clarified the sequence of the “three Ds”: “We are focused on disengagement first, and discussions on de-escalation and de-induction will happen at the appropriate time.”

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* On Wednesday, he said that the “endorsement” of the agreement by Modi and Xi “should certainly lead to an easing of the situation along the LAC”. These steps have “set the process in motion” for bringing relations back to a normal path, and it is necessary for both sides to continue on this path, Misri said.

Caution: 'trust, but verify'

After the Modi-Xi meeting, however, a few divergences emerged.

* The Indian readout said the PM welcomed “the recent agreement for complete disengagement and resolution of issues that arose in 2020 in the India-China border areas”.

The Chinese statement only said the two leaders “commended the important progress the two sides had...made...on resolving the relevant issues in the border areas”.

India has maintained that until the border standoff is resolved, there cannot be business as usual with China. Beijing’s position has been that the border issue should not impact bilateral ties.

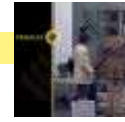
* About the next steps after the leaders’ meetings, the Indian readout specifically said that “the Special Representatives on the India-China boundary question will meet at an early date...to explore a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the boundary question.”

The Chinese readout said the two sides had “agreed on holding talks between their foreign ministers and officials at various levels to bring the relationship back to sound and steady development at an early date”.

As such, there is a fair bit of caution in India’s strategic circles about the next steps going forward.

The border pact has set a process of trust-building in motion, and if both sides keep their word, it will be at least a couple of years before the entire three-step process of disengagement, de-escalation, and de-induction of troops is completed, and ties return to normal.

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