

Darbuk-Shyokh-Daulat Beg Oldie Road

Why in news?

The construction of the DSDBO road may be the most consequential reason why China is targeting Indian Territory along the LAC in Ladakh.

What is the current situation?

- Large numbers of Chinese troops had massed along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and had come a little further than they used to earlier.
- The Chinese build-up along the Galwan River valley region overlooks, and hence poses a direct threat to the Darbuk-Shyokh-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road.
- The token mutual de-escalation of the two armies is expected to be completed over an extended period.
- The withdrawals are subject to reciprocal endorsement.

Where is DSDBO road?

- It is a 255-km long “all-weather” road, running almost parallel to the LAC at Aksai Chin.
- The 37 **prefabricated military truss bridges** along the road are what that makes the DSDBO an all-weather road.
- It meanders through elevations ranging between 13,000 ft and 16,000 ft.
- It took India’s Border Roads Organisation (BRO) almost two decades to construct this road.
- In 2019, 500-m-long Bailey Bridge (the world’s highest bridge) was inaugurated on the road.
- Its strategic importance is that it connects Leh to Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO), virtually at the base of the Karakoram Pass that separates China’s Xinjiang Autonomous Region from Ladakh.

Where is DBO?

- DBO is the northernmost corner of Indian territory in Ladakh, in the area better known in Army parlance as Sub-Sector North.
- DBO has the **world’s highest airstrip**.
- This airstrip was originally built during the 1962 war.
- It was abandoned until 2008, when the Indian Air Force (IAF) revived it as

one of its many Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) along the LAC.



What is the importance of the DSDBO highway?

- The DSDBO highway provides the Indian military **access to the section of Tibet-Xinjiang highway** that passes through Aksai Chin.
- The road runs almost parallel to the LAC in Aksai Chin that China occupied in the 1950s.
- The DSDBO's emergence seemingly panicked China.
- This is evidenced by the 2013 intrusion by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China into the nearby Depsang Plains, lasting nearly 3 weeks.

How is India protecting this region?

- DBO itself is less than 10 km west of the LAC at Aksai Chin.
- A military outpost was created in DBO in reaction to China's occupation of Aksai Chin.
- It is at present manned by a combination of the Army's Ladakh Scouts and the paramilitary Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).
- There are additional strategic considerations in the area.
- To the west of DBO is the region where China has a boundary with Pakistan in the Gilgit-Baltistan area.
- This is also the critical region where China is currently constructing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK), to which India has objected.
- This is the region where Pakistan ceded over 5,180 sq km of PoK to China in 1963 under a Sino-Pakistan Boundary Agreement, contested by India.

Is there an alternate route?

- An alternate route exists from Leh to DBO through the 17,500-ft-high Sasser Pass.

- [Sasser Pass was part of ancient Silk Route connecting Leh to Yarkand.]
- It leads from the Nubra Valley into the Upper Shyok Valley en route to China's Karakoram Pass.
- This indicates the strategic interlinking of the entire disputed region between India and China and to a lesser extent, Pakistan.
- For most of the year, Sassar pass is snow-bound and inaccessible.
- The BRO is currently building a "glaciated road" between Sasoma (north of Leh, near the Nubra river) to the Sasser Pass, but it could take several years to complete.
- But even when it is, the alternate DBDSO will remain critical to the Army and its defences in the region.

Source: The Indian Express

