

Doklam Face-off

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- Earlier in June, Indian troops intervened to block the path of Chinese People's Liberation Army soldiers engaged in building road-works on the **Doklam plateau** of Bhutan's territory that Beijing laid claim.

\n

- Beijing responded by closing access to Indian pilgrims seeking to proceed through the Nathu La pass on to Kailash-Mansarovar.

\n

\n\n

What is the history of standoff?

\n\n

\n

- Bhutan shares a 470 km border with China in the north.

\n

- Since 1984, it has been in talks with the Chinese and has succeeded in reducing its disputed territory from 1128 sq kms to just 269 sq kms.

\n

- This, however, was done by Bhutan voluntarily ceding territory. But **China continues to maintain its claims over seven areas** and is pushing the hardest in the Doka La area.

\n

- In 1998, the two sides signed an Agreement for the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity in the Bhutan-China Border Area.

\n

- The treaty explicitly says that prior to the final solution of the problem, the two countries should maintain "the status quo of the boundary prior to March 1959."

\n

- This, is what the Bhutanese say is being violated in China's action in constructing a road in the Doklam region.

\n

\n\n

What must be the Chinese motives?

\n\n

- \n
- First, it would like to promote the development of the Yadong region, which is connected to Lhasa with a highway.
- \n
- This is linked to China's **aim of re-establishing Tibet's geopolitical centrality** in the trans-Himalayan region.
- \n
- Second, China would like to **establish formal ties with Bhutan**, set up an embassy in Thimphu and develop direct trade connections with it.
- \n
- Third, it would like to **adopt a military posture in the area** which will ensure that it can defeat India in any military contest.
- \n
- Given the strong Indian positions in Sikkim and adjacent areas, **control of the Doklam plateau** would allow China's military to cut through Bhutan to the Siliguri corridor, thus, to cut off India's North-eastern states from the rest of the mainland.
- \n
- So, China is mixing military coercion with diplomatic and economic inducements and at the same time it is seeking to check India's efforts to help Bhutan.
- \n

\n\n

For India, how this issue assumes importance?

\n\n

- \n
- **Opening up Nathu La to traffic** in 2006 was an important part of the effort to normalise Sino-Indian relations since this old route offers Lhasa the closest access to a port.
- \n
- By blocking the pilgrims, the Chinese are slowly turning the clock back on Sino-Indian relations.
- \n
- India's military presence in Doklam gives it the **ability to snap vital road links between Lhasa and the Nathu-La region** in the event of war.
- \n
- For a China wary of India's growing military infrastructure on the LAC, this is a substantial concern. Because, **Sikkim is the only part of the where**

India has a tactical advantage.

\n

- Equally, New Delhi has reasons to assert a muscular presence, as it seeks to reassure the kingdom that it will not allow Chinese encroachment.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Indian Express

\n

