

# DEADLY CLASH BETWEEN NUCLEAR-ARMED NEIGHBOURS

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India and China, two nuclear-armed Asian neighbours, are in a tense diplomatic and military standoff following their first deadly border clash in more than 40 years. The 15 June incident in the disputed Galwan Valley, an arid Himalayan area along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the de facto border between the two nations, left 20 Indian soldiers dead. China has yet to officially declare its casualties. Indian and Chinese troops have been engaged in the standoff since early May at several points along the 3,500km (2,200-mile) LAC, most of which remains un-demarcated. The heightened tensions between the world's two most populous countries have drawn international concerns, with the United Nations urging both sides "to exercise maximum restraint". (*Aljazeera*)



## ***Recent historical context***

There has been much speculation over the cause of the 15 June clash, but most experts agree on two main reasons. The first is India's unilateral move last year to repeal Article 370 of the Indian constitution – which had guaranteed a measure of autonomy to the former Jammu and Kashmir state – which includes the disputed areas in the Ladakh region, where the clash occurred in the Galwan Valley. China, like Pakistan, saw India's move as unilaterally affecting its territory, and both countries strongly denounced the move at the UN Security Council last year. The second is India's recent construction of infrastructure in border areas. India inaugurated the 255km Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road, built along the LAC, last year. China again objected, seeing the move as a threat to its interests in the region. China's economic corridor (part of the One Belt, One Road initiative) to Pakistan and Central Asia passes through Karakoram, which is close to Galwan Valley, the site of the 15 June clash. China has invested an estimated \$60 billion in the CPEC project with Pakistan – the Ladakh region is seen as crucial to the success of this project.

## ***India's other disputes with neighbours***

In the past 70 years, India has only succeeded in resolving its boundary issues with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. In addition to its dispute with China, India has recently found itself at loggerheads with two other neighbours – long-standing rival Pakistan, and Nepal. Nepal and India have historically enjoyed good ties but now find themselves engaged in what analysts have called a cartographic war over disputed border regions. Last week, Nepal's Parliament approved a new map for the country, which includes land controlled by India. Nepal and India share an open border of about 1,880 km. The two countries have finalised 98% of the border, but the Lipulekh pass, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura in western Nepal are among the areas that remain contested. Media and some officials in India have accused China of instigating the changes to Nepal's map, a charge to which China has not responded. But, in November last year, India also produced a revised map, when it divided Indian-administered Kashmir into Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. That map incorporated some of the territories disputed with Nepal inside India's borders. India is concerned about China's growing influence in the region, predominantly through its massive One Belt, One Road infrastructure programme.

India and Pakistan have waged two wars over Jammu and Kashmir. Indian-administered Kashmir has been under a security lockdown since August last year when the Muslim-majority region's limited autonomy, under Article 370, was revoked. India has stepped up military operations in the disputed territory since the nationwide coronavirus lockdown was imposed in late March. Local media estimates that 30 rebel fighters have been killed in the past three weeks. Pakistan and India often trade fire in the disputed Himalayan region, with each blaming the other side for initiating the fire. This has again been the case, and on Monday 22 June in an emergency meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC's)

Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir (via video conference), Pakistan called upon the OIC to "facilitate a lasting solution" to its long-smouldering dispute with long-time rival India. Pakistan wants India's decision to revoke Article 370 rescinded and are pushing for UN-supervised referendum for the disputed region.

### ***Possible outcomes***

It is not envisaged that any of the long-standing territorial disputes will be settled quickly or in the same manner. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi responded to the clash with China quite differently to numerous confrontations with Pakistan. In a televised address on Wednesday 17 June, Mr Modi summed up his stance: "India wants peace, but when provoked, India is capable of giving a fitting reply, be it any kind of situation." Regional analysts maintain that, despite there being much to gain from defusing the situation, the staunchly nationalist leadership of Mr Xi and Mr Modi, means that relations will not calm down quickly. India could also pursue stronger military ties with the United States – and other countries such as Australia, Japan, Indonesia, and Vietnam – that are pushing back against China's growing assertiveness in the region.

### ***FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE***

It is significant that these border disputes are in the heart of the '10/40 window' (a rectangular geographic area stretching from North Africa through the Middle East to Asia, covering 68 countries - its name comes from its position between 10 and 40 degrees north latitude), where Islam (Pakistan), Hinduism (India and Nepal), Buddhism (Nepal and China) and non-religious (China) meets. On a map, it might look like an insignificant part of the world, but spiritually it is the meeting place of the largest religions in the world, after Christianity. This makes it spiritually a very dark place, and simultaneously, a very strategic place. It should therefore not be a surprise that these border disputes are rooted in power and pride, with the two most populous countries in the world, at its centre, vying for regional dominance.

Within missions, India is known as the country with the most 'unreached' people groups in the world, and China is known as the country with one of the fastest-growing mission movements globally. With the enormity of the task to reach every tribe and tongue in India with the Gospel, the Church will need the help of the Chinese mission force to accomplish it. It will thus be to the benefit of the Church to see strong ties between India and China, thus facilitating the movement of more Chinese missionaries into India as a result, which will help fulfil the 'Great Commission' (Matthew 28:18-20). The global Church should, therefore, make it a priority to pray into this spiritual 'hotspot', so that disputes like these may be peacefully resolved, that these two nations can build stronger relations, for the building of the Lord's Kingdom.

Please pray with us:

- For the Lord to raise up peacemakers who can effectively defuse the situation
- For more 'prayer warriors' to intercede for this strategic region
- For a greater mobilisation of believers to reach the 'unreached'

IMAGE:

REUTERS/Anushree Fadnavis