

Statement Re: Recent Developments in India`s Relations with China

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (DR. SUBRAHMANYAM JAISHANKAR):

Hon. Speaker, Sir, I rise to apprise the House of some recent developments in the India-China border areas and their implications for our overall bilateral relations. The House is aware that our ties have been abnormal since 2020, when peace and tranquility in the border areas were disturbed as a result of Chinese actions. Recent developments that reflect our continuous diplomatic engagement since then have set our ties in the direction of some improvement.

The House is cognizant of the fact that China is in illegal occupation of 38,000 sq. km. of Indian territory in Aksai Chin as a result of the 1962 conflict and events that preceded it. Furthermore, Pakistan illegally ceded 5,180 sq. km. of Indian territory to China in 1963, which had been under its occupation since 1948. India and China have held talks for multiple decades to resolve the boundary issue. While there is a Line of Actual Control (LAC), it does not have common understanding in some areas. We remain committed to engaging with China through bilateral discussions to arrive at a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable framework for a boundary settlement.

Hon. Members would recall that the amassing of a large number of troops by China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh in April/May 2020 resulted in face offs with our forces at a number of points. The situation also led to disruption of patrolling activities. It is to the credit of our Armed Forces that despite logistical challenges and the then-prevailing COVID situation, they were able to counter-deploy rapidly and effectively.

Hon. Speaker, Sir, the House is well aware of the circumstances leading up to the violent clashes in Galwan Valley in June 2020. In the months thereafter, we were addressing a situation that had seen not only fatalities for the first time in 45 years, but also a turn of events serious enough for heavy weaponry to be deployed in close proximity of the LAC. While a determined counter-deployment of adequate capability was the Government's immediate response, there was also the

imperative of a diplomatic effort to defuse these heightened tensions and restore peace and tranquility.

Hon. Speaker, Sir, the contemporary phase of our ties with China dates back to 1988, when there was a clear understanding that the Sino-Indian boundary question will be settled through peaceful and friendly consultations. In 1991, the two sides agreed to maintain peace and tranquility in the areas along the LAC pending a final settlement of the boundary question. Thereafter, in 1993, an Agreement was reached on the maintenance of peace and tranquillity. Subsequently, in 1996, India and China agreed on confidence-building measures in the military field.

In 2003, we finalized a Declaration on Principles for our Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation, which included the appointment of Special Representatives. In 2005, a protocol was formulated on Modalities for the Implementation of Confidence-Building Measures along the LAC. At the same time, the political parameters and guiding principles for the settlement of the boundary question were also agreed upon.

In 2012, a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) was established. A year later in 2013, we reached an understanding on border defence cooperation as well. The purpose of my recalling these Agreements is to underline the elaborate nature of our shared efforts to ensure peace and tranquillity in the border areas. And to emphasize the seriousness of what its unprecedented disruption in 2020 implied for our overall relationship.

The situation arising after our counter-deployment in 2020 called for multiple sets of responses. The immediate priority was to ensure disengagement from friction points so that there would be no further untoward incidents or clashes. This has been fully achieved, as I will explain.

The next priority will be to consider de-escalation that would address the massing of troops along the LAC with associated accompaniments. It is also evident that the management of border areas will require further attention in the light of our recent experiences.

In all of this, we were and we remain very clear that the three key principles must be observed in all circumstances: (1) both sides should strictly respect and observe the LAC, (ii) neither side should attempt to unilaterally alter the *status quo*, and (iii)

agreements and understandings reached in the past must be fully abided by in their entirety.

Hon. Members would appreciate that as a result of the sustained tension and specific developments in the border areas, our overall relationship with China was bound to be impacted adversely. In the new circumstances, it was obviously not possible to continue the normal exchanges, interactions and activities as in the past. In this regard, we made clear that the development of our ties was contingent on the principles of mutual sensitivity, mutual respect and mutual interests.

Throughout this period, hon. Members would also be aware that Government had publicly maintained that India-China relations cannot be normal in the absence of peace and tranquillity in the border areas. The combination of a firm and principled stance on the situation in the border areas as well as our clearly articulated approach to the totality of our ties have been the foundation of our engagement with China for the last four years. We have been very clear that the restoration of peace and tranquillity in the border areas would be the basis for the rest of the relationship moving forward.

Since 2020, our engagement was therefore focused on that objective. This took place at various levels involving different arms of the Government. I myself have had meetings with my Chinese counterpart, as indeed has my senior colleague, the Raksha Mantri ji. Our NSA has also engaged his Chinese counterpart, both being Special Representatives on the boundary question.

More detailed discussions were conducted by the Working Mechanism for Cooperation and Coordination (WMCC) in India-China Border Affairs at the diplomatic level. Its military counterpart was the Senior Highest Military Commanders (SHMC) meeting mechanism. The interactions were naturally tightly coordinated with the combined presence in the negotiations of both diplomatic and military officials. Since June 2020, 17 meetings of the WMCC and 21 rounds of SHMC have taken place.

So, in that background, I would like to inform the House today about the agreement reached on 21 October, 2024 regarding Depsang and Demchok. The twin considerations of an unstable local situation and an impacted bilateral relationship were clearly the drivers for the most recent endeavours to conclude the disengagement. These two areas have been the focus of our discussions in

both WMCC and SHMC with the Chinese side since September 2022, when the last disengagement agreement was concluded at Hot Springs area.

In the lead up to the 21st October, 2024 agreement, I had discussed both the specific disengagement issue as well as the larger relationship with my Chinese counterpart FM Wangyi in Astana on 4th July and Vientiane on 25th July. Our National Security Advisor and his Chinese counterpart also met in St. Petersburg on 12th September. The problem in these two areas pertained primarily to obstructions of our long-standing patrolling activity. In Demchok, there was also the question of access by our nomadic population to traditional grazing grounds, as well as to sites of significance to local people.

As a result of this recent understanding arrived at after intensive negotiations, resumption of patrolling to the traditional areas is underway. It was initially tested by sending out patrols for verification of disengagement on ground and is being followed up by regular activities as per the agreed understanding.

Following the 21st October understanding, Prime Minister and President Xi Jinping had a meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Kazan on 23rd October, 2024. They welcomed the understanding and directed the Foreign Ministers to meet and stabilize and rebuild bilateral relations. The Special Representatives are also to oversee the management of peace and tranquillity in the border areas besides exploring a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the boundary question.

In pursuance of that, I held discussions with Foreign Minister Wang Yi again on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro on 18th November, 2024.

Raksha Mantri has also met the Chinese Defence Minister, Dong Jun, at the ASEAN Defence Ministers (ADMM+) meeting in Vientiane on 20th November, 2024. The two Ministers discussed progress on the recent agreement on disengagement, the need to address de-escalation along the LAC, and the requirement of strengthening confidence building measures. They agreed on the importance of continuing meetings and consultations at various levels.

The House will remember that the 21st October, 2024 agreement is the latest in a series of understandings in regard to the resolution of the situation in various friction points in Eastern Ladakh. In the aftermath of the events of May-June 2020, and the initial disengagement in Galwan Valley in July 2020, there was a Foreign Ministers meeting in Moscow on 10th September, 2020.

At that time, the Government's position was underlined that the immediate task was to ensure a comprehensive disengagement of troops in all the friction areas. It was also emphasized that the large concentration of troops along the LAC was not in accordance with the 1993 and 1996 Agreements. And that the Indian side would not countenance any attempts to change the *status quo* unilaterally. We also expected that all agreements and protocols pertaining to the management of the border areas would be scrupulously followed.

Sir, through you, I would like to inform the House that the disengagement has now been achieved in full in Eastern Ladakh through a step-by-step process, culminating in Depsang and Demchok. With the task of disengagement completed, it is now our expectation that discussions would commence in regard to the remaining issues that we had placed on the agenda.

For the benefit of hon. Members, I wish to flag for your attention the previous positions articulated in Parliament previously by the Government on this issue. On 15th September, 2020, Raksha Mantri had made a detailed statement on Chinese attempts to transgress the LAC and the appropriate response given by our armed forces. On 11th February, 2021, Raksha Mantri ji again briefed the House about the agreement on disengagement in the North and South banks of Pangong Lake.

Thereafter, in August 2021, a third phase of disengagement took place in the area of Gogra, whereby troops would henceforth be in their respective bases. The next step took place in September 2022, which pertained to the Hot Springs area. Again, forward deployments ceased in a phased, coordinated and verified manner, resulting in the return of troops to their respective areas. The most recent 21st October, 2024 agreement comes in the wake of the earlier disengagements. It completes the first phase of what was agreed to in Moscow in September 2020.

As the Members are aware, there is a long history of frictions, transgressions and face offs in several sectors of the India-China border. This goes back to Barahoti from 1954, to Longju in 1959, to Sumdorong Chu from 1986-1995 and Depsang in 2013, amongst others. In the past, earlier Governments have agreed to a range of steps to defuse situations that have arisen at different times, including offers on our side to create de-militarized zones, limited non-patrolling zones, relocation or withdrawal of posts, disengagement of troops and dismantlement of structures. Different locations have seen different solutions being examined.

Where the October 21 understanding is concerned, our objective has been to ensure patrolling as in the past to the relevant patrolling points, as well as resumption of grazing by our civilians as per longstanding practice. This is indeed what we have agreed upon in regard to Depsang and Demchok.

In a few other places where friction occurred in 2020, steps of a temporary and limited nature were worked out, based on local conditions, to obviate the possibility of further friction. This, I must stress, applies to both sides and can be revisited as the situation demands. In that sense, our stance has been resolute and firm and serves our national interest fully.

The ensuring of our national security in this manner is the result of cumulative and coordinated endeavors of many parts of the Government, obviously centered around the defense and security forces. Indeed the competence and professionalism of our services in this period was displayed in our speedy and effective counter-deployment. In the negotiations with China, the defence and diplomatic arms worked in lockstep to ensure that our national interests were comprehensively met.

In that context, the House would also recognize that there has been a significant improvement in the border infrastructure which has made such effective counter-deployment possible. This is reflected, amongst others, in the increase of border infrastructure allocations in the last decade. The Border Roads Organization alone has incurred three times the expenditure level of what it was a decade ago. Whether it is the length of the road networks, of the bridges or of the number of tunnels, there has been a substantial increase over the earlier period.

Notable milestones in recent years include the Atal Tunnel to Lahul- Spiti, the Sela and Nechiphu Tunnels to Tawang, the Umlingla Pass road in Southern Ladakh and the extended opening of the Zojila Axis. Work is progressing on some strategically important roads and air fields in Ladakh. The adoption of new technologies in high altitude, remote, inaccessible and permafrost areas has also been significant. All of this reflects the Government's firm commitment to protecting our borders and ensuring that our Armed Forces get the facilities and logistical support that they deserve.

Finally, let me share with the hon. Members our expectation regarding the direction of our ties with China in the near future. Our relationship had progressed in many domains, but was obviously negatively affected by recent events. We are

clear that the maintenance of peace and tranquility in border areas is a pre-requisite for the development of our ties. In the coming days, we will be discussing both de-escalation as well as effective management of our activities in the border areas.

The conclusion of the disengagement phase now allows us to consider other aspects of our bilateral engagement in a calibrated manner, keeping our national security interests first and foremost. In my recent meeting with Foreign Minister Wang Yi, we reached an understanding that the Special Representatives and the Foreign Secretary level mechanisms will be convening soon.

I thank you, Sir and the hon. Members for their attention and am confident that the Government has their full support in addressing the complexities of this important relationship.

श्री अखिलेश यादव (कन्नौज) : महोदय, मैं मंत्री जी से यह जानना चाहता हूँ कि आप रेजांगला वॉर मेमोरियल बनाएंगे या नहीं बनाएंगे?

विधि और न्याय मंत्रालय के राज्य मंत्री; तथा संसदीय कार्य मंत्रालय में राज्य मंत्री (श्री अर्जुन राम मेघवाल) : इसमें डिस्कशन नहीं होता है। ? (व्यवधान)

माननीय अध्यक्ष : आइटम नं. 14 - बैंककारी विधियां (संशोधन) विधेयक, 2024।

? (व्यवधान)

माननीय अध्यक्ष : सदन नियमों और प्रक्रियाओं से चलता है। नियम और प्रक्रिया में हमारी लोक सभा में यह होता है कि किसी भी स्टेटमेंट के बाद कोई भी सप्लीमेंट्री प्रश्न नहीं पूछा जाता है। ये कानून आपके बनाए हुए हैं, ये संसद द्वारा बनाए हुए कानून हैं।

? (व्यवधान)

माननीय अध्यक्ष : ऑनरेबल फाइनेंस मिनिस्टर।

? (व्यवधान)

14.25 hrs