



KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY
Only IAS Academy by Grandson of "Perunthalaivar Kamarajar"

? India-China Border Talks Advance Boundary Delimitation and Institutionalised Border Management Through an Eight-Point Consensus

Published On: 31-08-2026

Recent Developments:

India and China reached an **eight-point consensus** during the **25th round of Special Representatives' (SR) Talks** on the boundary question held in Beijing on **25 August 2026**.

The Indian side was represented by **National Security Adviser Ajit Doval**, while the Chinese side was represented by **Foreign Minister Wang Yi**.

Both countries agreed to advance discussions on an **"Early and Substantial Harvest"** in boundary delimitation and improve mechanisms for managing the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)**.

The consensus focuses on maintaining **peace and tranquillity**, strengthening military communication, improving border management and sustaining dialogue on a **fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement**.

The two sides also agreed to hold the **26th round of SR Talks in India in 2027**.

India-China Boundary Dispute:

Nature and Extent of the Dispute:

India and China have differing perceptions of the alignment of the **LAC**, resulting in overlapping territorial claims and periodic face-offs.

India considers the boundary to extend for approximately **3,488 km**, while the two countries have not mutually agreed upon a clearly demarcated international boundary.

The dispute is generally divided into the **Western Sector, Middle Sector and Eastern Sector**.

Western Sector – Aksai Chin:

China controls approximately **38,000 square kilometres** of territory in Aksai Chin, which India considers part of the Union Territory of Ladakh.

The sector has major strategic importance because it connects Tibet with Xinjiang and lies close to India's sensitive northern frontier.

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477** / Whatsapp : **09710729833**

Middle Sector – Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand:

The Middle Sector covers relatively smaller areas of disagreement along parts of **Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand**.

Territorial differences in this sector are comparatively limited, making it potentially more manageable for negotiated progress.

Eastern Sector – Arunachal Pradesh:

China claims approximately **90,000 square kilometres** of territory administered by India as Arunachal Pradesh.

China rejects the **1914 McMahon Line** and refers to parts of the region as **Zangnan**, while India considers Arunachal Pradesh an integral and inalienable part of its territory.

Evolution of the India-China Boundary Negotiation Framework:

Historical Institutional Framework:

India and China have developed multiple diplomatic and military mechanisms to prevent differences along the boundary from escalating into armed conflict.

The **1993 Agreement on Peace and Tranquillity** established the principle of maintaining stability along the LAC pending a final settlement.

The **1996 Agreement on Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs)** introduced military confidence-building arrangements along the border.

The **2003 mechanism of Special Representatives** elevated boundary negotiations to a political level.

The **2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles** provided an important framework for pursuing a final boundary settlement.

The **Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC)**, established in 2012, provides a diplomatic mechanism for handling border-related issues.

Impact of the 2020 Eastern Ladakh Crisis:

The crisis in eastern Ladakh significantly disrupted bilateral relations and demonstrated the fragility of existing confidence-building mechanisms.

The experience reinforced India's position that **peace and tranquillity in border areas are essential for the normal development of bilateral relations**.

Consequently, preventing local incidents from escalating into wider strategic confrontation has become a central objective of recent negotiations.

Towards an “Early and Substantial Harvest”:

Meaning of the New Approach:

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477** / Whatsapp : **09710729833**

The latest consensus seeks to pursue practical and incremental progress instead of waiting exclusively for a comprehensive final settlement.

Both countries reaffirmed their commitment to a **fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution** based on the **2005 Political Parameters and Guiding Principles** and subsequent SR-level understandings.

An **Early and Substantial Harvest** does not imply immediate resolution of the entire boundary dispute; rather, it indicates an attempt to achieve meaningful progress in appropriate areas and mechanisms.

New Mechanisms Under the WMCC:

The **Expert Group on Boundary Delimitation** will advance discussions on areas where progress in identifying an agreed boundary alignment may be possible.

The **Working Group on Border Management** will focus on practical measures for maintaining stability along the disputed frontier.

Both mechanisms will initially finalise their respective **Terms of Reference (ToR)**, which will determine their scope and operational priorities.

Delimitation and Demarcation:

Delimitation refers to determining and agreeing upon the legal alignment of an international boundary.

Demarcation refers to physically marking an already agreed boundary on the ground through pillars, markers or other recognised methods.

Therefore, progress in delimitation represents an important political and legal step but does not automatically amount to complete physical demarcation.

Strengthening Military Communication and Border Management:

Additional Communication Mechanisms:

India and China agreed to establish **two additional meeting points** for General-level or Senior Highest Military Commander-level interactions.

They also agreed to create **two additional military hotlines in the Eastern and Middle Sectors**.

Existing diplomatic and military mechanisms, including the **WMCC and local commander-level meetings**, will continue to address ground-level situations.

Strategic Significance:

Additional communication channels can reduce the possibility of **misunderstanding, miscalculation and unintended escalation**.

Rapid communication is particularly important because differing perceptions of the LAC can lead patrols of the two sides to encounter each other unexpectedly.

Institutionalised communication creates a structured process for resolving incidents before they acquire wider political or military consequences.

Improved understanding of the LAC in appropriate areas could also contribute to more predictable border management, although it remains distinct from a final settlement of the boundary question.

Trans-Border Rivers and the Brahmaputra:

Importance of River Cooperation:

India and China agreed to hold the next meeting of the **Expert-Level Mechanism on Trans-Border Rivers** in September.

Discussions are expected to include **hydrological data sharing, renewal of relevant Memoranda of Understanding and broader trans-border river management.**

Such cooperation is important because several rivers originating on the Tibetan Plateau flow downstream into India.

Brahmaputra River Concerns:

The **Brahmaputra**, known as the **Yarlung Tsangpo** in Tibet, originates in the Tibetan region before entering India and subsequently flowing into Bangladesh.

India's concerns include the availability of timely hydrological information, flood forecasting, ecological impacts, sediment movement and the possible downstream implications of upstream infrastructure projects.

Reliable data sharing is important for **disaster preparedness, flood management, water security and protection of downstream populations.**

Cooperation on trans-border rivers demonstrates that environmental and resource-security issues can require sustained engagement even when broader strategic relations remain difficult.

Significance of the Eight-Point Consensus for India:

From Crisis Management to Institutional Management:

The consensus represents an attempt to strengthen regular institutional mechanisms rather than relying exclusively on ad hoc crisis diplomacy.

Better military communication can improve the management of local incidents and reduce escalation risks.

Preserving India's Strategic Interests:

India can pursue diplomatic engagement while simultaneously maintaining **military preparedness and infrastructure development** along the LAC.

Dialogue does not eliminate the need for credible deterrence because unresolved territorial differences and strategic competition continue to shape the bilateral relationship.

Creating Space for Broader Engagement:

Greater stability along the border can create conditions for cooperation and communication in other areas of the bilateral relationship.

However, progress in broader relations will depend upon sustained implementation of border-management commitments and avoidance of renewed ground-level tensions.

Challenges and Limitations:

Unresolved Territorial Claims:

Fundamental differences over the alignment of the boundary and the LAC remain unresolved.

An institutional mechanism can manage disputes more effectively, but it cannot automatically reconcile competing territorial claims.

Trust Deficit:

The legacy of the 2020 crisis has created a significant strategic and military trust deficit.

The effectiveness of new mechanisms will depend upon consistent implementation and adherence to mutually agreed procedures.

Difference Between Management and Settlement:

Improved hotlines, meetings and crisis-management mechanisms can stabilise the border without producing a final political settlement.

Therefore, progress should be assessed through concrete outcomes rather than diplomatic declarations alone.

Way Forward:

India should follow a **dual-track approach of credible deterrence and sustained diplomacy**.

Military preparedness, border infrastructure and surveillance capabilities should be strengthened alongside diplomatic engagement.

Progress in boundary delimitation should be **incremental, verifiable and consistent with established agreements**.

Communication mechanisms should be regularly tested and institutionalised to ensure their effectiveness during crises.

Cooperation on trans-border rivers should prioritise **timely data sharing, disaster preparedness and environmental security**.

Any normalisation of bilateral relations should remain linked to the sustained maintenance of **peace and tranquillity along the border**.

Conclusion:

The 25th India-China Special Representatives' Talks represent an important effort to move from episodic crisis management towards **institutionalised border management**. The proposed Early and Substantial Harvest, new military communication channels and continued engagement through the WMCC can reduce the risk of accidental escalation. However, the fundamental boundary dispute remains unresolved. For India, the most prudent approach

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477** / Whatsapp : **09710729833**

is to combine **diplomatic engagement with strategic preparedness**, while pursuing gradual, verifiable and mutually acceptable progress towards a long-term settlement.