











exercise was carried out according to the Memorandum of Understanding for exchange and cooperation in the field of Defence signed in 2006 and listed in the annual exchange plan for 2008.

The third, fifth, and seventh editions of Hand-in-Hand were conducted in China in 2013, 2015, and 2018 respectively, while the fourth edition and sixth editions were held in India in 2014 and 2016. The eighth edition was held in India in 2019.

## India and China Border Dispute and Security Issues

Relations between India and China have been characterized by border disputes, resulting in the Sino-Indian War of 1962, the border clashes in Nathu La and Cho La in 1967, and the 1987 Sumdorong Chu standoff. But, since 2008, both countries have extended their strategic and military relations.

The India-China border dispute is an ongoing territorial dispute over the sovereignty of two relatively large and several smaller territories between India and China. Since 2013, border disputes have reemerged. The Indian and the Chinese army got engaged in a standoff at the Doklam plateau along the disputed Bhutan-China border. 2020, the Galwan Valley clash resulted in the death of 20 Indian soldiers and an undisclosed number of Chinese soldiers. The two major border dispute areas in the India-China border dispute include:

- Aksai Chin Region
- McMahon Line

## Brahmaputra Issue Between India-China

The Brahmaputra/Yarlung Tsangpo is a trans-Himalayan river originating in the Jima Yangzong glacier (Mansarovar Lake region) near Mount Kailash.

- It is also known as Siang/Dihang River in Arunachal Pradesh and Luit, Dilao in Assam. Over 56% of Brahmaputra/Yarlung Tsangpo flows in Chinese territory.
- The Yarlung Tsangpo enters India after passing the Great Bend, through Arunachal Pradesh, where it is known as Siang/Dihang, then onto Assam, where it is called the Brahmaputra, and thereafter to Bangladesh, where it is named Jamuna.
- The Brahmaputra gets mightier as it flows downstream because of the flow contribution of tributaries such as Dibang, Lohit, and Subansiri.
- China completed the Zangmu Dam (510 MW capacity) built on the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra in 2010. Three more dams at Dagu (640 MW), Jiacha (320 MW), and Jeixu are currently under construction.
- The work on Zam hydropower station, which will be the largest dam on the Brahmaputra, commenced in 2015.

Brahmaputra delta is home to 130 million people. In the 1990s, the length amid Dhubri and Sadiya in India was proclaimed National Waterway No.2 and used for freight carriage. India is also planning a multipurpose 10,000 MW hydropower project in Arunachal Pradesh on the river. Whereas China, has undertaken gigantic water diversion projects such as the South-North Water Transfer Project (SNWTP) to address its regional water distribution imbalance.

The construction of Dams over the Brahmaputra River in the Tibet region has raised concerns on the Indian side. The Brahmaputra agreement between China and India is a suboptimal

arrangement within broader bilateral relations. China has thus far agreed to share hydrological data on the Yarlung Tsangpo/Brahmaputra (YTB) during the monsoon season. Developmental imperatives and domestic politics influence the Indian approach to the YTB issue.

India tends to play the lower riparian card to gain sympathy from its domestic political constituencies, especially Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Also, India needs to showcase its strength and firmness in negotiations with China on water rights, as it did in the case of the Doklam stand-off and in opposing the Belt and Road Initiative, rather than projecting itself as a victim.

## China's Debt-Trap Diplomacy

Brahma Chellaney coined the term in 2017. China's Debt-Trap diplomacy refers to the predatory lending practices which overwhelm poor countries with unsustainable loans and force them to cede strategic leverage to China. China leverages its state-sponsored loans to advance its trade and geopolitical interests aggressively.

Small Laos recently signed a 25-year concession agreement allowing a majority Chinese-owned company to control its national power grid, including electricity exports to neighboring countries, the latest to fall prey to China's debt-trap diplomacy.

India has not entered into any loan agreement directly with China. However, it has been the top borrower of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Indian efforts towards joint India–Japan Asia–Africa Growth Corridor are aimed at checking China's One Belt One Road initiative, though it is no match for Belt and Road Initiative. India's involvement with QUAD aims to deter China's control over the South China sea and collectively reduce the trade imbalance with China.

## China's Belt and Road Initiative and its Implications for India

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or the One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative is one of the biggest projects China's President Xi Jinping started in 2013 to restore the ancient Silk Route, which connected Asia and Europe. It is a global infrastructure development strategy by China. The BRI serves as pushback against the much-touted U.S. 'pivot to Asia'.

BRI project includes building a big network of roadways, railways, maritime ports, power grids, oil and gas pipelines, and linked infrastructure projects. The project covers two parts- the Silk Road Economic Belt, which is mainly land-based and is expected to connect China with Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe. And Secondly, the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which is sea-based and is expected to will China's southern coast to the Mediterranean Sea, Africa, South-East Asia, and Central Asia.

India opposes the BRI as it does not offer a level playing ground to the country's businesses and has boycotted 2 BRI summits. India opposes the BRI because the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes through PoK, which means technically Indian territory but buildings, dams, and roads are there without India's consent. China is also using the BRI to build influence in the Indian ocean. China has ports in Sri Lanka (Hambantota port) and has invested in infrastructure in Myanmar, Maldives, and Malaysia.

- India must seek help from partners like Japan when necessary to build and upgrade its infrastructure and create an alternative to Chinese-led connectivity corridors and infrastructure projects.
- With a collaboration like QUAD, India can somewhat deter Chinese aggression in South East Asia. India must also invest in and develop its strategic assets like the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, to project power across the Indian Ocean, and maintain bilateral collaboration with countries like Russia and Japan, while also remaining engaged with entities like BIMSTEC and the Bay of Bengal community, where China is not a member.



## China's Maritime Strategy and Implications for India

China's maritime ambitions span beyond sea-borne commerce to seek great power status globally. China's expanding diplomatic relations with countries of the Indian Ocean and its modernizing naval capabilities, together reflected by its 'String of Pearls' strategy, allay international fears. China's recent strategic maneuvers in and around the Indian Ocean threaten India's economic and security interests.

- With the modernization of the Chittagong naval port in Bangladesh, China intends to deter the movement of the Indian navy in the Bay of Bengal. China is also apparently planning to develop a submarine base at Marao in the Maldives to counter the Indian navy's southern command.
- As part of China's naval strategy to encircle India, Beijing is building many bases around India in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.



- China's Sanya naval base in the South China Sea, an underground nuclear submarine base, is about 1,200 nautical miles from the strategic Malacca Strait and the nearest naval base to India.
- With the Gwadar naval base construction in Pakistan (400 km east of the Strait of Hormuz), China plans to restrict the movement of the Indian Navy in the Arabian Sea. The strategically important Gwadar will also reinforce Pakistan's Karachi naval base against India.
- In Sri Lanka, China is said to be developing Hambantota port to provide extensive bunkering facilities to its submarines and warships.
- China is also in the process of upgrading its surveillance capabilities at the Great Coco Islands in Myanmar, besides constructing two helipads and storage space for weapons.
- A Chinese electronic intelligence unit at the Coco Islands tracks India's missile launch facilities on the eastern sea coast at Chandipur in Orissa, besides intercepting classified communications emerging from India's first tri-services command at the Andaman and Nicobar.

## India-China Relations: Way Forward

India-China should properly handle the historical and practical problems in the bilateral relations and care for each other's concerns while increasing trust and dispelling doubts. It is crucial for the two countries not to sharpen rhetoric against each other and look for a pragmatic solution to the existing problems between the two countries. The onus lies on India and China to maintain stability in South Asia, which is beneficial for the people of the whole world and the common people of India and China in particular. India-China should stick to the ethics of the Panchsheel (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence) and must strengthen coordination on international and regional affairs through more regular and high-level political engagement. India-China should carry forward the spirit of good neighborliness, friendship, unity, and cooperation.