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## **India-China Geo-Political relations: A Study of the Emerging Dispute in North East Region**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The relation between China and India is mainly characterised by the border conflicts and political strains in the relation. The most common border of the two countries lies in the north-eastern part of the Indian province of Kashmir and South-western part of China, The Aksai Chin and the southern part of China and the Eastern part of India in NEFA. In spite of the improvement in bilateral relations, several issues still act as irritants in the relations between these two countries. Conflicts and Skirmishes in North and North Eastern part of India is still ongoing. Here in my article I want to represent the border problems regarding North-eastern part of India and how it affect the relation between these two countries.

**Keywords:** India, China, North-East, Border

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### **Introduction:**

India and China are geographically located in Asia and separated by Himalayan mountains. Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Jammu and Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh lies between the two countries. India and China have long peaceful relations for thousand of years. But after the victory of Chinese Communist Party in Chinese Civil war in 1949, frequent border disputes were emerged between them. They both subsequently extended their influence to the rest of Asia. China has also used military and economic aid successfully, to increase its influence in the region, while also exploiting India's border disputes with its neighbours.

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### **Data and Research Methodology:**

The methodology used for this research is historical, analytical and descriptive. Both primary and secondary sources will use in this study but major portion of the study material constitutes of secondary sources. The primary sources of data and information will be collected from various reports published online and already conducted interviews of the political and defence leaderships, annual defence reports, joint statements, and other official reports of the External Affairs and Defence Ministries. The secondary sources include books, articles in various journals, National Security Strategy Documents, magazines, periodicals, web sources, newspapers, working papers of various educational and research institutes.

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### **Research Objectives:**

1. To study the emerging geopolitics in the North-eastern region, which is leading both India and China towards 'security dilemma'.
2. To study how the historical legacy of rivalry in the relation between India and China in north east sector.
3. To examine the issue of Tawang in relation between India and China.
4. To examine how the dispute between these countries made an impact in South Asian Politics.

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### **Literature Review:**

According to Rajiv Sikri (2011), "The Tibet Factor in India-China Relations", Tibet is a key factor in India – China relations. Only after the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1950 did India and China come to share the common frontier that is now being contested. In past few years, China's military build-up and growth of infrastructure in Tibet, as well as reported plans to divert or dam rivers rising in Tibet and flowing into India, have elevated the anxieties of India. Chinese insecurity about Tibet, on the other hand, is a major driver of its strategy to India. India was unable to alleviate the concerns of China over its potential use of the Dalai Lama's presence in India and its big Tibetan refugee population of about 120,000 to generate difficulty for China in Tibet. The Dalai Lama's existence and a big Tibetan refugee community in India have held alive the „Tibetan question“. With India's open democratic

regime and a lengthy tradition of providing shelter to persecuted peoples, India will discover it politically difficult to satisfy the expectations of China on the Tibet issue without a substantial quid pro quo. The breakdown of talks between the Chinese government and representatives of the Dalai Lama does not augur well for the future, and a post-Dalai Lama situation could become much more complicated. Of late, China's aggressive territorial claims on India, the deepening of the China-Pakistan alliance and a shift in China's position on Kashmir has led to a hardening of India's position on Tibet. India is now seeking fulfillment with what it sees as the key problems of India's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Until this tangled knot is unraveled, relations between India and China are unlikely to be on an even keel.

Swakshyar Saurav Talukdar (2015) in his words, "Sino-Indian Border Relationship From 1914-1962", as the two populous nation and Asia's largest and most dynamic societies China and India have become the world's most important fastest growing Economies. And beyond any doubt their participation and influence and regional and world affairs have increased over the time. However, it was not comfortable relationship between the two Asian giants. From the very starting of the association between the two new nation-states, formed at the end of the 1940s, the border dispute, a colonial legacy, existed. The border issue is one of the most protracted and complicated problem between the two countries. The border issue is not, in reality, standing alone but is linked to many other bilateral and global problems. The balance of power in Asia depends largely on the peaceful co-existence of India and China.

According to Rajat Pandit (2017), "India-China troop stand-off continues, with both sides sending reinforcements", the tense face-off between Indian and Chinese armies in the area at the Sikkim-Bhutan-Tibet tri-junction showed No signs of Tuesday's decline, with both parties strengthening their positions with auxiliary soldiers in the distant border region. China has formally accused Indian troops of "crossing the border" in order to interrupt the building of a highway in the region. Make it clear that the shutdown Nathu La Pass for the pilgrims because of the border stand-off. As stated earlier by TOI, while in Arunachal Pradesh and eastern Ladakh such transgressions and troop face-offs along the 4,057-km long LAC are quite prevalent, they are comparatively uncommon in Sikkim. But in November 2007, PLA soldiers destroyed a few improvised Indian Army bunkers in the Doka La region. The Border Defense Cooperation Agreement, which was launched in October 2013 as a significant confidence-building measure between the two nations, aimed at ensuring that troop face-offs are efficiently defused at the local level itself, is yet to be fully operational on the ground.

Avinash God bole (2010) Book on, "Contradictory Tendencies in the India-China Relationship: Does it help the bilateral relationship?", gives India and China has had a contradictory relationship. And in more ways than one, what happened in the last one year epitomizes the future of the relationship between the two countries. On the one side, annual trade and investment numbers touch a fresh high, multi-level bilateral visits and interactions have accelerated in quantity, trust in the operations and intentions of each other in multilateral forums is at an unprecedented high level. At the same period, a gradual downswing has occurred bilaterally since Arunachal Pradesh was first claimed by the Chinese Ambassador to India as part of China at the end of 2006. Add the list of cross-border intrusions by the Chinese forces, the media outcry in India over the intrusions, the role of the Chinese media over the Dalai Lama, and the ignorance of the Chinese media about the nature of the Indian media. The argument here is that, despite the prevailing contradictions for the future of India-China relations for multiple reasons, this might be a useful thing to push for higher bilateral commitment.

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### Scope of the Study:

The bilateral relation between India and China is very popular in the contemporary world. The border problems between them since 1962 is a major concern. After the late 1980s, both countries rebuild diplomatic and economic ties. Both the countries are witnessing economic prosperity from last two decades after opening up their economies. But since 2013, the border dispute re-emerged in the mutual relations of these two countries. In 2018, along the Bhutan-China border, two armies got engaged in a standoff at the Doklam plateau Armed Standoffs and Skirmishes along the Sino-Indian border escalated after 2020. After the Galwan valley incident in 2020, India and China troops clashed along the Yangste river in Tawang sector in Arunachal Pradesh. This border disputes remains continuously from the past decades. Here the main theme of my study will be the emerging issue regarding the geo-political dispute centering the North-eastern region between India and China.

Arunachal Pradesh is a largest state in the north-east and shares international borders with Tibet to the north and northwest, Bhutan towards the west and Myanmar to the east. However, China claims Arunachal Pradesh as a part of southern Tibet. While China may lay claim to the entire state, its main interest lies in the district of Tawang, which is the north-western region of Arunachal and borders Bhutan and Tibet. China's interest in Tawang could be for tactical reasons as it provides a strategic entry into India's north-eastern region. Since 1962, the border dispute between India and China is very offensive. The Sino-Indian border is divided into three areas- the western sector around Ladakh; the middle sector made up of boundary between India's Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand states with Tibet; and the eastern sector consisting of the boundary at Arunachal Pradesh. My study will be basically lies between the border dispute in the areas of North-east region. The recent tension arises between India and China relating to Arunachal Pradesh is the basic theme of my study.

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### History between China and India's North East Sector:

The relationship between China and India started with cultural and economic relations during ancient times. The modern Indo-China diplomatic relationship began in 1950 when India was among the first non-Communist countries to end formal relations with the Republic of China and recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the legitimate government of both mainland China and Taiwan.

Though an agreement signed between China and India on Tibet in 1954, China did not recognise Indian territory included the Assam Himalayan region up to the McMahon Line in North East Region. Border confrontation remains constant in this region as China's aggressive policy towards India to take over some part of it. The border clash resulted in an overall defeat of India as the China pushed the Indian forces to within 48 km of the Assam plains in

the northeast. China was actively engaging in active propaganda campaign against India and supplied ideological, financial and other assistance to dissident groups, especially to tribes in north-eastern India. In 1967 also, the India-China border disputes were happened in the contested border of Sikkim. In 1986, China's construction of a military post and helicopter pad and India's grant of statehood to Arunachal Pradesh (formerly the North-East Frontier Agency) in February 1987 caused both sides to deploy troops to the area. The problem regarding the border areas and also with Arunachal Pradesh is still ongoing. Conflicts, skirmishes were happened frequently. India claimed Arunachal Pradesh as it's own and although China is claiming the same.

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### **Contemporary issues between India and China in the North-Eastern region of India:**

North-eastern regions of India comprises of eight states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. They sharing borders with countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Nepal which makes it conducive to international trade. This region has immense natural resources accounting for around 34% of the country's water resources and almost 40% of India's hydropower potential. It is strategically located with access to the traditional domestic market of eastern India and is also a vantage entry point for South-East Asian markets.

North-east is viewed as a strategically sensitive region that needs to be protected to safeguard India's national security. Greater engagement with region provides India a stronger diplomatic and economic foothold where China's influence and presence are considerable. Lack of enough resources, poor border infrastructure and boundary disputes with China leading to the 1962 war compelled the Indian government to become more inward looking and turn even its North-eastern borders into frontiers rather than bridges and trade corridors. With an aggressive China frequently displaying the intention to challenge India that India have to protect the regional peace and security.

Chinese claim of Indian sovereign territory of Arunachal Pradesh as its South Tibet, unsettled borders, trust deficit, lack of identifiable demarcation of Line of Actual Control (LAC) and frequent spoilers like Doklam incidents, pose a serious challenge to the security in Northeast. North-eastern states remain connected to rest of India by Siliguri Corridor with a narrow width of only 17 kilometres and despite our strong defensive posture, it mentally isolates Northeast India. Although India has tried to mitigate the problem by establishing a rail route via Bangladesh, but it can hardly be termed it as a strategic alternative to the Siliguri Corridor. The strategy behind the Doklam crisis was Chinese intent to get closer to the corridor. 'Chicken's Neck' or the Siliguri corridor is India's gateway to the South East and also accounts for the maximum number of international boundaries that India shared with its neighbours.

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### **Significance of China-India confrontation in North-eastern Region:**

Arunachal Pradesh, known as the Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA) until 1972, is the largest state in the northeast and shares international borders with Tibet to the north and northwest, Bhutan towards the west and Myanmar to the east. While China may lay claim to the entire state, its main interest lies in the district of Tawang, which is in the north-western region of Arunachal and borders Bhutan and Tibet. Taking control of Arunachal would mean that Bhutan would have Chinese neighbours on both its western and eastern borders if Beijing gained control.

Tawang is a critical point in the corridor between Tibet and Brahmaputra Valley. China's interest in Tawang could be for tactical reasons as it provides a strategic entry into India's north-eastern region. China claims that the monastery is evidence that the district once belonged to Tibet. They cite historical ties between the Tawang monastery and the Lhasa monastery in Tibet to support their claim over Arunachal. Tawang is an important center of Tibetan Buddhism and there are some tribes in the upper Arunachal region which have cultural connections to the people of Tibet. According to some experts, China fears that the presence of these ethnic groups in Arunachal could at some stage give rise to a pro-democracy Tibetan movement against Beijing.

There are several other factors that China is more prone to North-Eastern part of India. Infrastructure developmental assistance in neighbouring countries is integral to China's 'Infrastructure and Purse diplomacy of South Asia'. It is part of China's policy to project its soft power in the region. Almost all countries in the region have witnessed Chinese involvement in ongoing infrastructure projects. Chinese increasing influence in Bangladesh and Myanmar, who have joined BRI project, is also a matter of concern for India. China's infrastructure development in Yunnan and its extension to Myanmar, besides increasing its influence in North eastern gives it access to the Bay of Bengal and brings its connectivity in close proximity to Indian borders with Myanmar.

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### **Conclusion:**

China sees itself as the regional hegemon in South Asia, and India is definitely challenging this position. But better understanding of each other's regional initiatives through open dialogue is important to build trust. Mutually demilitarising the armed forces deployed by both countries will help to pave the way to build more trust through increased diplomatic relations and reduced threat perceptions.

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