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## **ABSTRACT**

Reports of incursions by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army along the Line-of-Actual Control (LAC) are rife in the Indian media. A commonly held opinion is that the Indian media tend to sensationalise their reportage of these incursions, or “China’s transgressions”, as the Indian government calls them. This paper analyses these incidents, as reported in select Indian newspapers, over a period of 12 years. It outlines the nature of these border activities to draw meaningful inferences on Sino-Indian border management. The paper concludes with specific policy recommendations.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The border between India and China is not clearly demarcated throughout. Along certain stretches of its 3,488-km length, there is no

mutually agreed Line of Actual Control (LAC).<sup>1</sup> India, following Independence, believed it had inherited firm boundaries from the British, but this was contrary to China's view. China felt the British had left behind a disputed legacy on the boundary between the two newly formed republics.

The India-China border is divided into three sectors, viz. Western, Middle and Eastern. The boundary dispute in the Western Sector pertains to the Johnson Line proposed by the British in the 1860s that extended up to the Kunlun Mountains and put Aksai Chin in the then princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Independent India used the Johnson Line and claimed Aksai Chin as its own. China initially did not demur when India said so in the early 1950s; however, in the years that followed it reversed its position and stated that it had never acceded to the Johnson Line and therefore did not see why it should cede Aksai Chin to India.<sup>2</sup> In the Middle Sector, the dispute is a minor one. It is the only one where India and China have exchanged maps on which they broadly agree. The disputed boundary in the Eastern Sector of the India-China border is over the MacMahon Line. Representatives of China, India and Tibet in 1913-14 met in Shimla, where an agreement was proposed to settle the boundary between Tibet and India, and Tibet and China. Though the Chinese representatives at the meeting initialled the agreement, they subsequently refused to accept it. The Tawang tract claimed by China was taken over by India in 1951.<sup>3</sup> Till the 1960s, China controlled Aksai Chin in the West while India controlled the boundary up to the McMahon Line in the East.

Nearly six decades have passed since then, but the border issue remains unresolved. It has turned into one of the most protracted border disputes in the world. Since 1981, when the first round of border talks was held, officials from India and China have met a number of times to find a solution to the issue.<sup>4</sup>

The two countries are also engaged in Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) on the border with bilateral agreements signed in 1993, 1996, 2005, 2012 and 2013. By the beginning of the 21st century, the two sides had agreed not to let the border dispute affect bilateral engagements. This was inked into the Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question signed in 2005. During Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to China in 2003, the two sides agreed on the appointment of special representatives for consultations aimed at arriving at a framework for a boundary settlement that would provide the basis for the delineation and demarcation of the border.

Despite two decades of CBMs and the thaw in bilateral relations, incidents on the border, known as “incursions”, “intrusions” or “violations” continue to be reported in the Indian media.<sup>5</sup> The terms, “incursion”, “intrusion” and “violation” are sometimes used interchangeably in Indian English-language newspapers to refer to Chinese actions in disputed areas of the LAC. The Indian government, denying that there have been Chinese intrusions along the LAC since 2010, prefers to call them “transgressions”.<sup>6</sup>

Although denial and underplaying of incidents on the Sino-Indian border was the general trend, at least on one occasion, the Indian government admitted the Chinese People's Liberation Army's (PLA) intrusion into Indian territory. The PLA reportedly entered 10 km inside the Indian territory in eastern Ladakh and set up a platoon-sized camp on 15 April 2013.<sup>7</sup> The incident preceded Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's state visit to India on 19 May 2013.<sup>8</sup> The April 2013 episode was not an innocent transgression; it was, by the Indian government's own definition, an intrusion—an intentional and provocative breach of the LAC.<sup>9</sup>

## Definition of Terms and Scope of Study

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines an “incursion” as “hostile entrance into a territory”, while the word “intrusion” refers to “the act of wrongfully entering upon, seizing, or taking possession of the property of another”, and “violation” means “disturbance” or “interruption”.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the terms “incursion” and “intrusion” have related meanings but the word “violation” has a different one. Another word for “violation” is “transgression.”<sup>11</sup> In this paper, all these will be referred to as “incidents”. The term “incident” refers to the occurrence of an action or situation that is a separate unit of experience.<sup>12</sup> ‘Incident’ can also be defined as “an action likely to lead to grave consequences especially in diplomatic matters, a serious border incident”.<sup>13</sup> Activities can be defined as “actions of a particular kind”.

This paper describes and analyses incidents and activities along the India-China border reported in select Indian national newspapers, to understand Sino-Indian relations in general, and border issues in particular. It is as much a study of the incidents as of the media. It attempts to draw inferences on the nature of the incidents and activities on the border, strictly based on news items in three newspapers: *The Times of India* (ToI), *The Hindu* (TH) and *The Indian Express* (IE). It covers the period from 01 January 2003 to 31 December 2014. It starts from 2003 because that was the year India and China signed the ‘Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation’, and decided to appoint Special Representatives to explore the framework of a boundary settlement from a political perspective. It ends in 2014, a year of political transition for India, when after a decade of Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, the opposition National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was elected at the Centre, with Narendra Modi becoming the 14th prime minister of India. ToI and TH are the

largest selling English-language newspapers in India, while IE is a nationally reputed English language newspaper.<sup>14</sup> The e-editions of three English language newspapers, ToI, TH and IE were used for this paper.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first discusses the nature of incidents occurring on the India-China border in terms of their number, sector of occurrence, type, duration, and their impact. The second deals with responses to border incidents. The third discusses activities on the border.

### NATURE OF INCIDENTS ON THE INDIA-CHINA BORDER

A total of 68 incidents were reported in the three newspapers: 27 incidents in ToI, 22 in IE, and 19 in TH. However, the same incident may have been reported twice or multiple times and so to get the actual number of incidents it was necessary to list separately all unique incidents. Table 1 lists the total number of incidents reported and the number which were unique.

**Table 1: Number of Incidents Reported and the Unique Incidents by Year and Newspaper**

Year	Number of Incident Reports			Number of Unique Incidents
	The Times of India	The Indian Express	The Hindu	
2003-2005	2	0	0	2
2006-2008	3	2	2	4
2009-2011	8	5	4	8
2012-2014	14	15	13	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>30</b>



By comparing the incidents reported in the three newspapers and singling out unique incidents, 30 such were found. Thus, 30 incidents will be the unit of analysis. Spread across 12 years, they average only 2.5 incidents per year. Interestingly, the incidents double between each of the three-year periods, from two in 2003-2005 to four in 2006-2008 to eight in 2009-2011 to 16 in 2012-2014. There was also a four-fold increase in the number of incidents from six between 2003 and 2008 to 24 between 2009 and 2014.

A distinction needs to be made between the incidents reported and the reports of government officials giving figures of incidents on the Sino-Indian border. A ToI report said Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiren Rijiju, told the Rajya Sabha that as many as 334 cases of transgressions by China had taken place in 2014 until August 4, as compared to 411 in the whole of 2013, 426 in 2012, 213 in 2011 and 228 in 2010.<sup>15</sup> For the corresponding years, the number of incidents reported in the newspapers consulted was nine in 2013, four in 2012, two in 2011 and three in 2010. News reports quoting officials also suggested that the number of incursions was 270 in 2008.<sup>16</sup> But only three incidents were reported in the entire period between 2006 and 2008.

The above distinction is made to show the vast inconsistency between the figures of incidents reported in the three newspapers and the number quoted by government officials in the same set of newspapers.

Of the total of 30 incidents, the Western Sector saw 19, the Middle three and the Eastern, eight. Thus more than two-thirds of the incidents were reported from the Western Sector. The percentage distribution of the incidents by sector was 63.33 in the Western Sector, 26.67 in the Eastern Sector and 13.33 in the Middle sector.

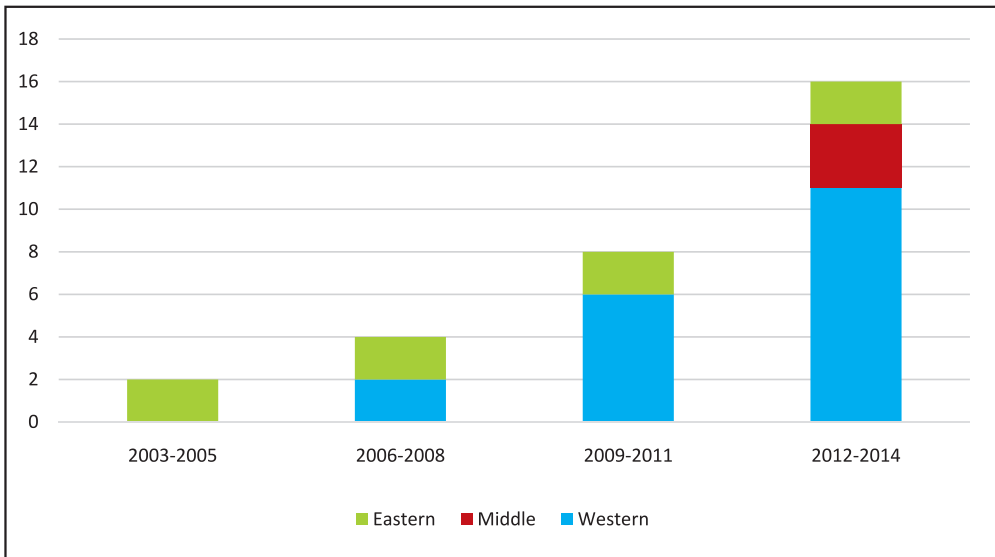
**Table 2: Number of Unique Incidents by Year and Sector of Occurrence**

SECTOR	YEAR				TOTAL
	2003-2005	2006-2008	2009-2011	2012-2014	
Western	0	2	6	11	19
Middle	0	0	0	3	3
Eastern	2	2	2	2	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>30</b>

For the years between 2003 and 2008, a maximum of four incidents out of the total of six were reported in the Eastern Sector.

Most of the incidents reported in the Western Sector were on the disputed Ladakh-Tibet Autonomous Region boundary. This more than 1,600-km-long sector has two distinct disputes: first, the issue of Aksai Chin, and second, of the Ladakh-Tibet Autonomous Region boundary from Changchenmo Valley (north of Pangong Lake) to the region of Spiti in Himachal Pradesh.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 1: Number of Unique Incidents by Year and Sector**



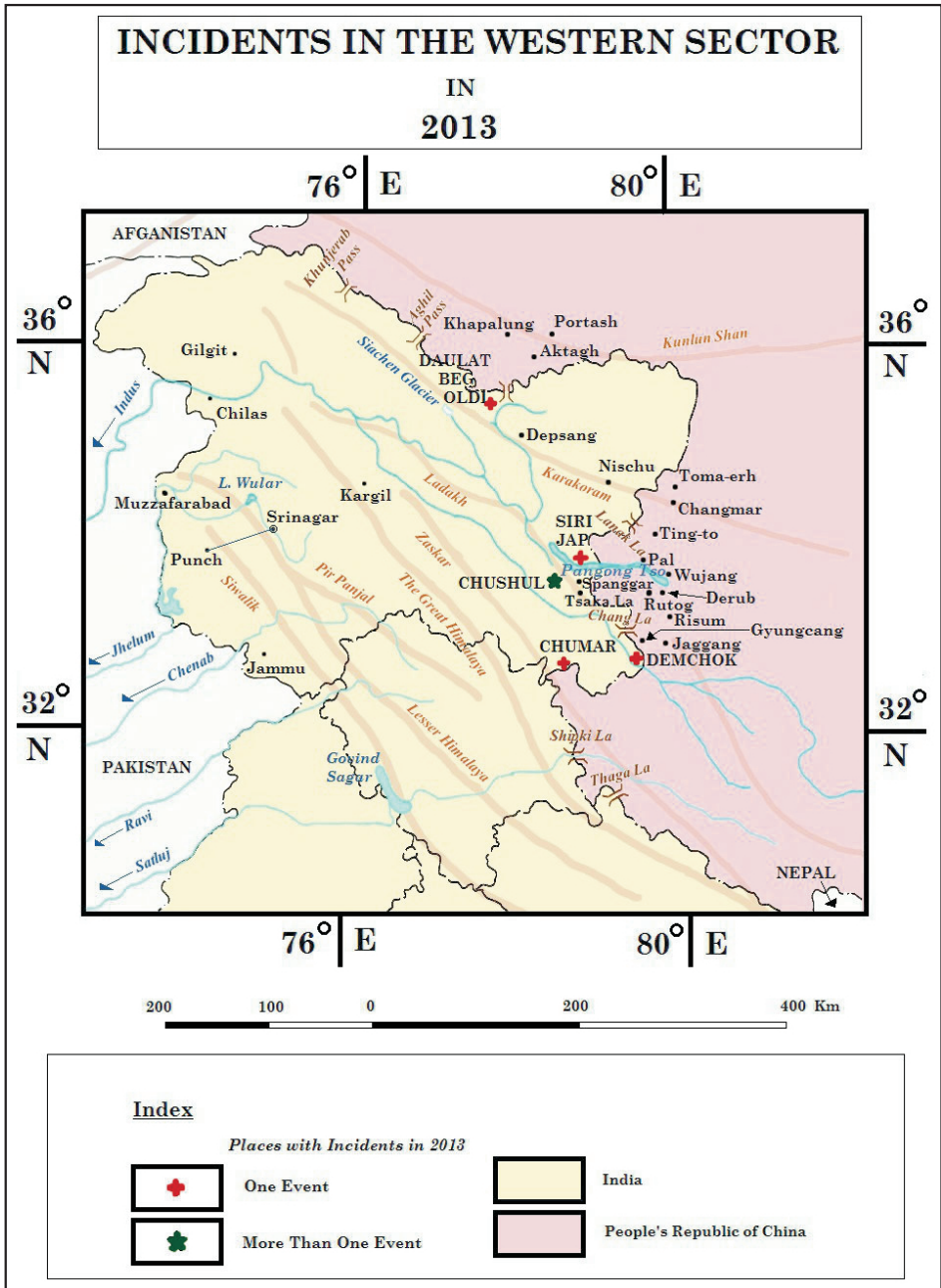
For instance, in 2013, when seven incidents were reported in the Western Sector, six took place along the Ladakh-Tibet Autonomous region boundary. The only exception was an incident in the Daulat Beg Oldi sector in the Aksai Chin region. The places in the Western Sector where the six incidents were reported from were in Siri Jap on 17 May, three separate incidents in Chumar on 17 June, 16 July and 20 July, in Chusul in the last week of July, and in Demchok on 18 August.

The five incidents reported in the Western Sector of the border in 2013 had a geographical spread across the entire Ladakh-Tibet Autonomous region boundary. Incidents covered the span ranging from the northernmost end of the Indian border in Ladakh at Daulat Beg Oldi to its southernmost end at Chumar (Figure 2).

The maximum number of incidents reported in the Middle Sector in a single year was three in 2012. These three were the only ones during the entire period of 2003 to 2014 in this sector (Table 2). All were aerial incidents that occurred over the state of Himachal Pradesh. A report in IE said that the then Chief Minister of the state, Prem Kumar Dhumal, informed the Centre about the violations by Chinese helicopters entering Indian airspace along the international border on 16 March.<sup>18</sup>

Both IE and ToI quoted former Uttarakhand Chief Minister Vijay Bahuguna claiming that, between 2006 and 2011, at least 37 incursions by Chinese forces occurred along the 350 km border that Uttarakhand shares with China.<sup>19</sup> According to Bahuguna, there were six incursions in 2006, two in 2007, 10 in 2008, 11 in 2009, five in 2010 and three in 2011. In contrast, for the corresponding period (2006-2011) there were no incidents reported in the newspapers in the Middle Sector.

**Figure 2: Incidents in the Western Sector in 2013**



Source: Map(Not Political) by Jaya Thakur, Junior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, Kolkata & based on National Atlas & Thematic Mapping Organization. India- Physiography. Map. [c.a. 1:6000000]. Kolkata: NATMO, 1997 and Oxford University Press. The Indian Subcontinent- Physical, Northern India and Nepal. Map. [c.a.1:5000000]. New Delhi: OUP, 2017.

In the Eastern Sector, there were only two incidents between 2007 and 2012. The two incidents ascribed to the 2006-08 period in Table 2 both belong to 2006, while the two included in the 2012-14 period took place in 2013 – one on the Arunachal Pradesh border and the other on Sikkim’s. Up to 2007, the only two incidents reported were in the Eastern Sector, the two in the Western Sector – according to Table 2 – occurring in 2008.

Of the four incidents in the Eastern Sector before 2008, two were in 2007 and one each in 2003 and 2005. The two incidents of 2007 occurred in the Thagla Ridge area of Arunachal Pradesh and in Sikkim. Both the incidents of 2003 and 2005 were in the Asafila area of Arunachal Pradesh. The incident of 2003 coincided with former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s visit to Beijing in June.<sup>20</sup> Chinese troops reportedly intruded into Asaphila again in May 2005, keeping the Eastern Sector in the focus of the boundary discourse. The 2005 incident too happened shortly after former Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao’s visit to India.

### Type of Incidents

The table below indicates whether the incidents were reported to have taken place on the ground or in the air.

Incidents on the ground by far outnumbered aerial incidents, numbering 24 to six aerial ones. All three incidents in the Middle Sector

**Table 3: Type of Incidents**

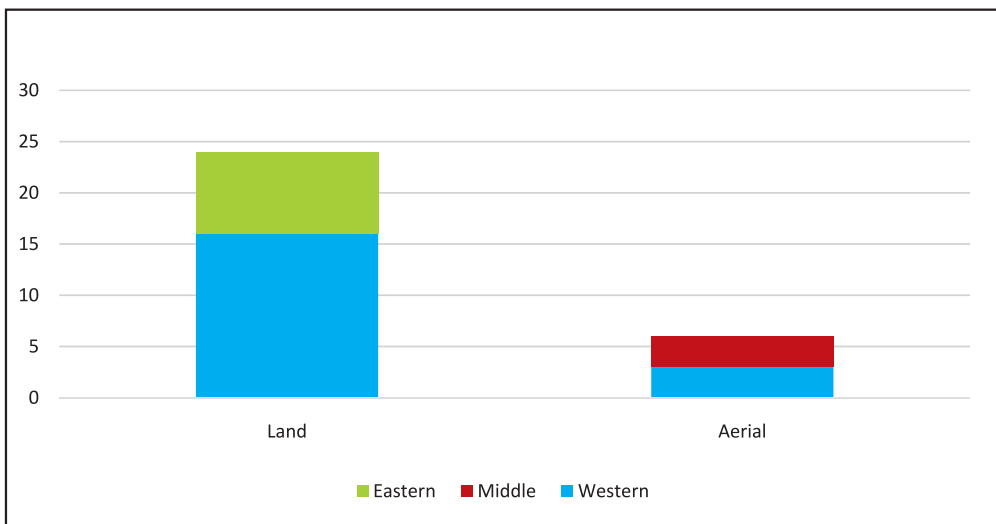
Sector	Ground	Aerial
Western	16	3
Middle	0	3
Eastern	8	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>6</b>

were aerial incidents. While three aerial incidents were reported in the Western Sector, no aerial incidents were found in the Eastern Sector. The highest number of aerial incidents occurred in the period 2012-2014, and all three of them were in the Middle Sector, over the state of Himachal Pradesh. Chinese helicopters were reported to have entered Indian airspace near Kaurik and Lapcha areas in the tribal districts of Kinnaur and Lahaul Spiti on 16 March and 19 March. Nothing is known about the third incident except its mention by Indo-Tibetan Border Police Inspector General, M.S. Bhurji as reported by TH.<sup>21</sup>

Though details of very few aerial incidents were reported in newspapers (six for the entire period), according to a TH report, former Union Defence Minister, A.K. Anthony told Parliament that there were 28 aerial violations by China along the LAC between January 2010 and July 2013.<sup>22</sup>

Both the 1993 Agreement on Peace and Tranquillity along the LAC on the India-China Border Areas, and the 1996 Agreement between India and China on CBMs on the India-China Border Areas talk about

**Figure 3: Type of Incident according to Sector**



measures to prevent air intrusions along the LAC. Article V of the 1996 Agreement particularly says combat aircrafts cannot fly within 10 km of the LAC. This article only allows “unarmed transport aircraft, survey aircraft and helicopters” to fly up to one km short of the LAC.<sup>23</sup> The cases of aerial incidents reported in 2012 in Himachal Pradesh were of Chinese helicopters entering Indian airspace. It is possible that the helicopters referred to were unarmed, and since helicopters can fly up to the LAC, they might have unintentionally crossed the LAC. No combat aircraft were reported to have crossed the LAC.

### Duration of Incidents

Incidents on the India-China border were found to have lasted for varied durations, ranging from a few minutes to a maximum of three weeks. Accordingly, the duration of incidents are categorised into ‘not more than a day’, ‘between two to seven days’, or ‘more than seven days’. There is also a category for incidents whose duration was not mentioned in the report.

Table 4 shows that the maximum number of incidents lasted not more than a day: 18 out of 30 of them, or 60 percent. The duration remained unknown for nine, or 30 percent of the incidents. Only one lasted between two and seven days, or 3.33 percent, and two incidents, or 6.67 percent, for more than seven days.

**Table 4: Duration of Incidents**

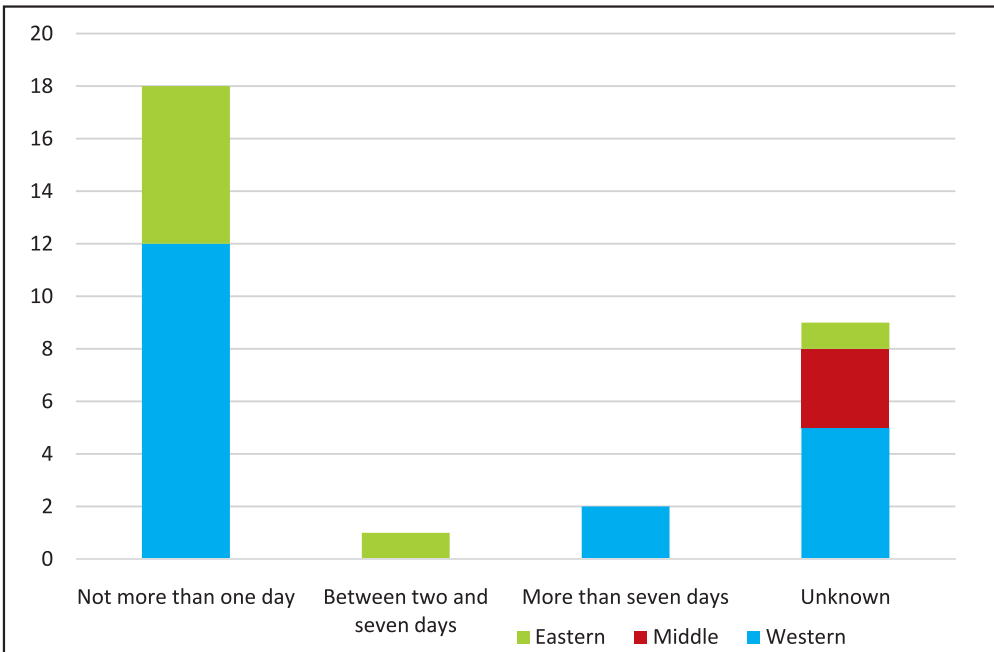
Sector	Not more than one day	Between two and seven days	More than seven days	Unknown
Western	12	0	2	5
Middle	0	0	0	3
Eastern	6	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>

The two incidents that lasted for more than seven days were in the Western Sector. The lone incident that lasted between two and seven days was in the Eastern Sector. For all the incidents in the Middle Sector the duration was unknown.

The lone incident that lasted between two to seven days was in 2013. It was reported that the Chinese entered 20 km into Indian territory in the Changlagam area of Arunachal Pradesh on 11 August and stayed there for about four days.<sup>24</sup> This intrusion was detected on August 13 by the Indian troops which asked the Chinese to go back. Only two incidents were found to have lasted for more than seven days. These were the three-week standoff in Daulat Beg Oldi, near Aksai Chin in April-May 2013, and the week-long faceoff in Ladakh’s Chumar region in September 2013.

The distribution of incidents according to their duration indicates that the Chinese PLA, on crossing over to the Indian side of the LAC,

**Figure 4: Number of Incidents according to Duration**





remained only till the Indian army detected the anomaly and asked the Chinese to withdraw from the Indian side. The lone incident of Chinese intrusion that continued between two and seven days was due to the delay in detection of the intrusion by the Indian Army. The Daulat Beg Oldi incident in April-May 2013 that lasted three weeks signalled a new activism on the border issue by China.<sup>25</sup> Chinese President Xi Jinping on 29 March 2013, before the Daulat Beg Oldi incident, had made a statement in Durban, South Africa, that the border issue between China and India should be resolved “as soon as possible”. If the Chinese action on the ground at Daulat Beg Oldi is taken in conjunction with President Xi Jinping’s statement in Durban, it is clear that China was signalling a new activism in its border dispute with India. This also becomes evident from Beijing’s official statements during two of the three week-long military action.<sup>26</sup>

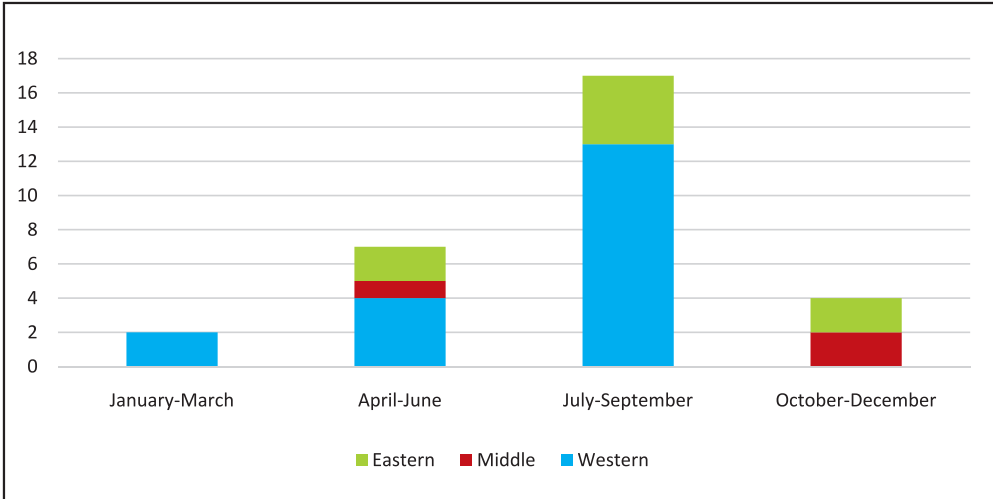
It was found that the maximum number of incidents (17) took place in the months between July and September (Table 5). The month of July reported the highest number. Five incidents each were reported in August and September.

It was found that increase and decrease in the number of incidents at any given time in the year depended upon weather conditions. A maximum number of 17 incidents took place in the months between July and September out of which 13 were in the Western Sector and the

**Table 5: Number of Incidents by Quarter**

SECTOR	MONTHS			
	January-March	April-June	July-September	October-December
Western	2	4	13	0
Middle	0	1	0	2
Eastern	0	2	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>4</b>

**Figure 6: Quarter-wise Number of Incidents**



remaining four in the Eastern sector (Table 5). Both the incidents in the Middle Sector were between October and December. January to March recorded no incidents in the Middle and Eastern Sectors. In the Western Sector, it was between October and December that the least number of incidents occurred.

### Impact

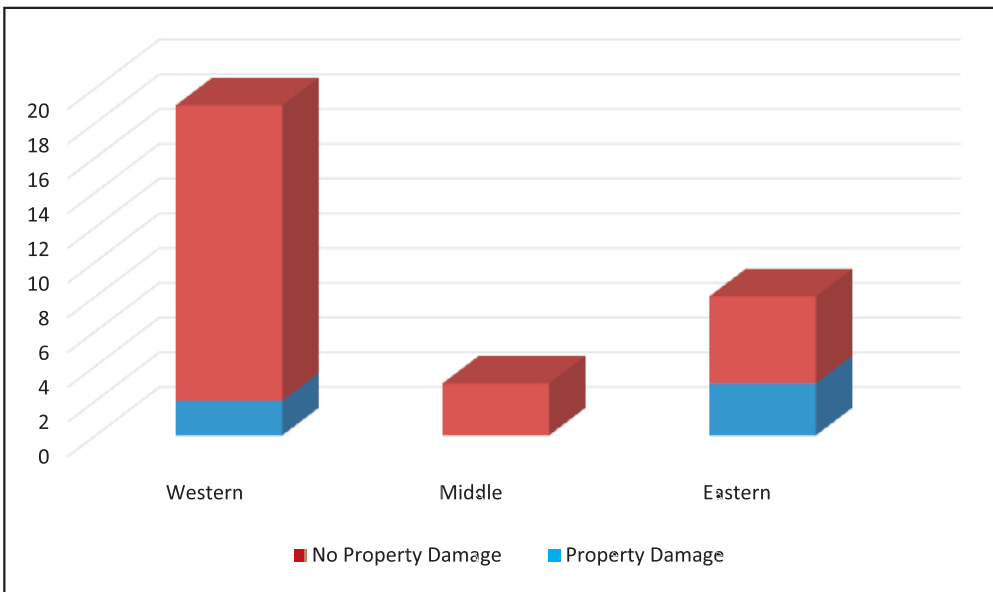
The impact of an incident can be divided into two categories, depending on whether or not any damage to property was reported in the newspapers. Property refers to any construction, installation or defence apparatus that lies within Indian territory.

In most of the incidents discussed in the newspapers, no damage to property was reported. Of 30 incidents, there was no damage inflicted in 25. Three of these five incidents resulting in property damage were in the Eastern Sector and two in the Western Sector. Thus, incidents that reported physical damage seemed to be sporadic ones.

**Table 6: Impact of Incidents**

Sector	Property Damage	No Property Damage
Western	2	17
Middle	0	3
Eastern	3	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>25</b>

**Figure 7: Impact of Incidents**



In a single year (2011), IE reported two incidents that caused property damage. It said that the Chinese damaged a 60-metre-high wall 250 meters inside Indian territory in the Yangste area in Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>27</sup> The second incident reported in IE was that of the PLA troops intruding into the Chumar sector in Ladakh and smashing some bunkers, apart from cutting the wires of some cameras installed at the Indian border post.<sup>28</sup> This was also reported in TH and ToI.<sup>29</sup>

In 2013, a PLA patrol in Chumar sector in Southern Ladakh took away a camera placed on the ground about six km ahead of an Indian army post. India is said to have raised the issue of the camera at the border personnel meeting, after which it was returned.<sup>30</sup>

## RESPONSE TO INCIDENTS

The responses discussed include both official statements as well as on-ground reactions to incidents on the border. It was found that responses varied depending on whether they were from the local army unit or from New Delhi. Sometimes no specific response to incidents was found reported.

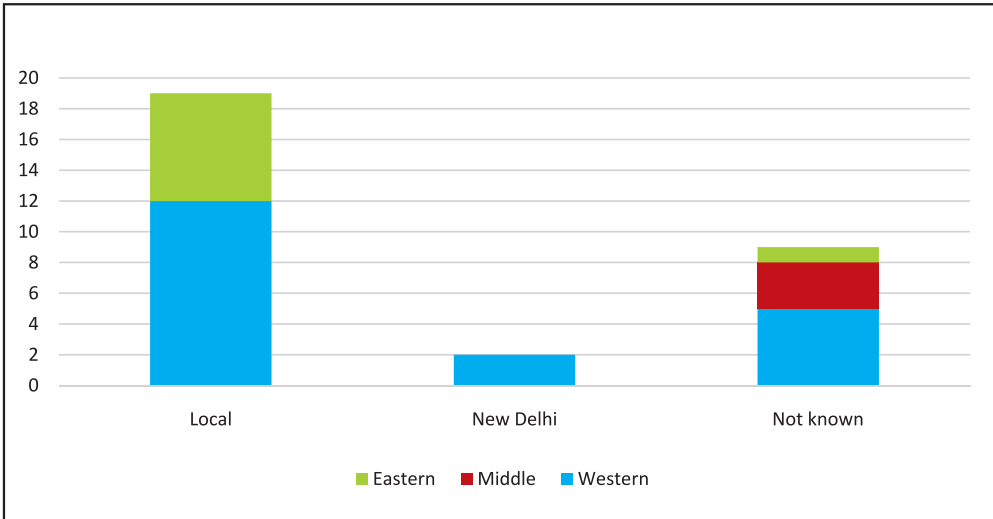
Some responses began as local and shifted to New Delhi because they could not be resolved locally. Only rarely did an incident reach a level of significance that demanded a response from the defence ministry or the external affairs ministry. It is significant that on many occasions, though the English-language press reported an incident, there was no response from either local or central authorities.

From news reports it is evident that most responses to incidents came from the local army unit which New Delhi probably considered adequate. Responses to 19 incidents out of a total of 30 incidents (i.e. 63.33 percent) were from the local level (Table 6). Only in two cases

**Table 7: Response to Incidents**

Sector	Local	New Delhi	Not known
Western	12	2	5
Middle	0	0	3
Eastern	7	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>

**Figure 8: Incident Responses**



(6.67 percent), the response was from New Delhi. Responses to nine incidents (30 percent) are not known.

Most local responses to incidents came in the form of holding a ‘banner drill’ and making the Chinese go back. A banner drill is a military exercise where the military personnel wave banners claiming an area as their territory.<sup>31</sup> One such incident of banner drill as a local response occurred in 2013 when, in the Ladakh region of the Western Sector of the India-China border, 50 Chinese soldiers intruded into Indian territory on 16 July 2013 and remained there for a day staking claim over the area.<sup>32</sup> The banner drill was organised after both patrolling sides came face-to-face. Such a response was agreed upon by both sides as part of their Standard Operating Procedure following the signing of the CBM agreement. This 1996 Agreement also discussed maintaining and expanding telecommunication links between their border representatives. The use of these mechanisms has also been reiterated by former Defence Minister, A.K. Anthony in a reply to a question in Parliament. He indicated that the issue of incursions had been taken up with Chinese authorities through established mechanisms such as hot-

lines, flag meetings, border meetings and normal diplomatic channels to maintain peace.<sup>33</sup>

Another kind of local response was the increase or decrease in patrolling by the Indian forces. An incident of decrease of patrols by Indian forces was reported in the last week of July 2013. In the said incident, an Indian army patrol, Tiranga, originating from the Trade Junction area in Leh of the Western Sector was intercepted by the PLA. The latter, mounted on heavy vehicles showing banners that this was Chinese territory, stopped the Indian patrol from proceeding further.<sup>34</sup> Reports of the incident also mentioned that the PLA erected an observation post to keep watch on Indian troops and monitor Indian patrol movement. When the Indian patrol was about to leave anyway, the Chinese intercepted it midway and sent it back. That year Indian forward bases launched a 'vigil' 21 times but could only complete them twice.

The two incidents that saw New Delhi respond were first, the three-week standoff in Daulat Beg Oldi, near Aksai Chin in April-May 2013, and second, the September 2014 faceoff in Ladakh's Chumar region. Both were in the Western Sector. A platoon-strength contingent of Chinese PLA came 10 km inside Indian territory in the Burtse sector's Daulat Beg Oldi area on the night of 15 April 2013 and set up a tented post there.<sup>35</sup> The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) jawans also established a post 300 meters from the Chinese tent and asked the latter for a flag meeting.

After the failure of the flag meetings to end the impasse, India sent an army contingent to the site.<sup>36</sup> Indian Foreign Secretary, Ranjan Mathai, summoned the Chinese Ambassador to India, Wei Wei, in the third week of April and stressed the need for an early resolution of the issue.<sup>37</sup>

The standoff in Daulat Beg Oldi continued till 29 April 2013, when a report said that China had erected an additional tent in the area, taking the number of such structures to five.<sup>38</sup> The additional tent by China was pitched after three flag meetings failed. On 5 May, the border standoff was said to have finally ended.<sup>39</sup> The resolution was reported to have been reached diplomatically after then National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon, and then Indian Ambassador to China, S. Jaishankar, held consultations with their Chinese counterparts.

The second incident was a faceoff between the troops of both sides on the very day, 18 September 2014, when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping were holding talks in New Delhi.<sup>40</sup> A total of 1,000 troops were reported to have moved inside the LAC in Ladakh's Chumar region in the Western Sector, leading to a faceoff. Prime Minister Modi, during the joint press conference between the two leaders, expressed concern over the incident.

The standoff continued till 26 September, when Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj met Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and discussed the matter with him on the sidelines of the UN conference in New York.<sup>41</sup> A few hours after the meeting, Chinese troops camping along the border withdrew. China said on 30 September that the frontier forces of the two countries had decided to withdraw simultaneously.

The Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA) signed by the two countries in 2013 was aimed at preventing incidents involving tailing of patrols, and generally streamlining channels of communication in case of a faceoff. A five-layer mechanism for communication between the two sides was agreed upon: first, flag meetings between border personnel on the LAC; second, meetings between senior officers of China's Military Regions and India's Army Commands; third, periodic meetings at the ministry level; fourth, meetings of the Working Mechanism (set up in 2013); and fifth, the

apex India-China Annual Defence Dialogue. The agreement also provisioned for both sides establishing military hotlines between their armed forces. The Agreement between India and China on the Establishment of a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs was also signed in 2012, a year prior to the signing of the BDCA. This agreement provisioned for a mechanism for strengthening exchanges and cooperation between military personnel and administrative bodies in respective areas.

Despite the agreements reached in consecutive years, the 2014 face-off in Chumar indicates the vulnerability of the CBMs in the absence of a clear roadmap for resolution of the border question. In the period that followed the signing of the 2005 agreement, China, at least on a couple of occasions, contravened certain key articles in it. The former Chinese Ambassador to India, Sun Yuxi's assertion in 2006 that the whole of Arunachal Pradesh is Chinese territory was one such instance.<sup>42</sup> His comments were in conflict with Article VII of the 2005 Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question which agrees in principle, that interests of settled populations on both the sides would be kept in mind while finding a solution to the border conflict.<sup>43</sup>

Again, Beijing's emphasis on the Eastern sector for border negotiations made the pitch more queer. At the Seventh round of Special Representatives talks held in 2006, China insisted that the Eastern sector, including Tawang, remained the focal point in border negotiations.<sup>44</sup> This again contradicted Article III of the 2005 Agreement that had agreed upon a package settlement of the border question.<sup>45</sup>

China's attitude is unlikely to lead to an early settlement of the border issue, despite the completion of the technical work pertaining to it.<sup>46</sup>



## BORDER ACTIVITIES

Four types of border activities by both India and China were mentioned in the newspapers: deployment of defence apparatus, troop reinforcements, construction of rail and road links, and military exercises. Continuing the trend of incidents, border activities undertaken by China and India totalled 34, averaging just about 2.83 activities a year. Indian activities outnumbered Chinese and understandably so, considering reports in Indian newspapers were used as sources. Table 8 shows the number of activities, divided according to country of occurrence.

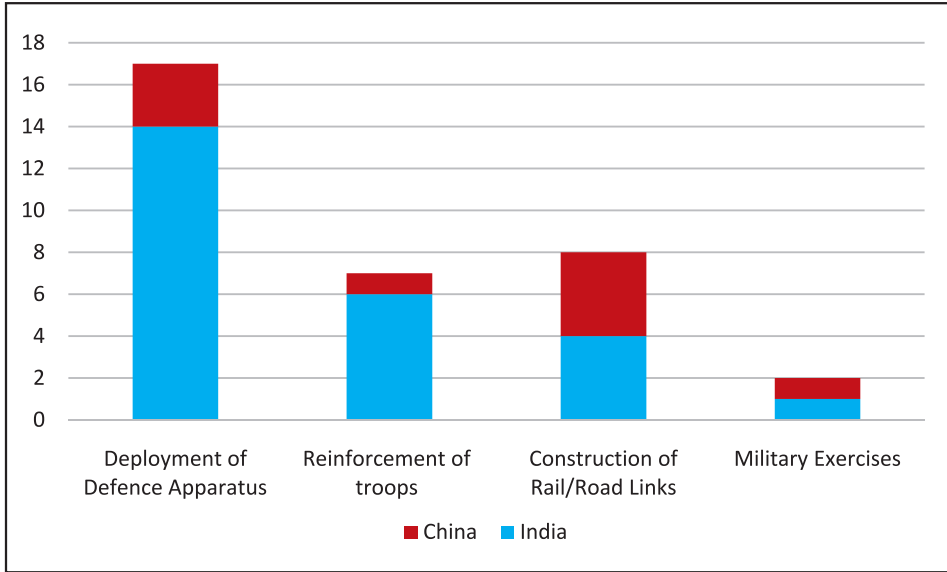
A total of 25 activities were found on the Indian side, whereas on the Chinese side only nine were reported in the newspapers looked at. Deployment of defence apparatus (17) outnumbered other activities on the border. Of the 17 such activities, 14 were undertaken by India and three by China. In case of reinforcement of troops, India engaged in six activities, while China had only one. There were an equal number of activities related to construction of rail/road links by both countries – four. One activity each by India and China were found of military exercises.

Deployment of defence apparatus was highest among all activities undertaken by India. Among the four deployments of defence apparatus reported in 2009, the first was part of India's plan to restructure the ITBP by equipping it with modern weaponry, surveillance equipment

**Table 8: Country-wise Number of Activities on the border**

Country	Deployment of defence apparatus	Reinforcement of troops	Construction of Rail/Road Links	Military Exercises	Total
India	14	6	4	1	25
China	3	1	4	1	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>34</b>

**Figure 9: Activities on the Border Undertaken by India and China**



and specialised vehicles.<sup>47</sup> India moved T-72 battle tanks and modern BMP troop carriers into the strategic ‘Finger Area’ in North Sikkim.<sup>48</sup> Formal induction of the Sukhoi Su-30 aircraft at the Tezpur Air Force station in Northern Assam close to the China border was another activity reported in 2009.<sup>49</sup> India was said to be boosting its defence capabilities along the China border with the induction of a series of 19 lightweight mountain radars and the strengthening of an advanced landing ground for possible fighter aircraft – this was the fourth activity on the border by India.<sup>50</sup>

In 2011, India’s defence ministry sanctioned the deployment of the Brahmos missiles in Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>51</sup> From China’s side, important activities included deployment of SU-27, SU-30, J-8 and J-10 aircraft at its airbases.<sup>52</sup>

Reports about India also included activities such as deployment of troops, missiles, tanks, guns and military aircraft close to the border, as well as suggestions that such deployment was part of an “affordable

deterrence” posture by India against China.<sup>53</sup> The moving of T-72 battle tanks and modern BMP troop carriers into Northern Sikkim was said to be India’s response to Chinese transgressions in the ‘Finger Area’ in Sikkim.<sup>54</sup>

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, India watched China add thousands of km of new road and rail links across Tibet, constructing an elaborate infrastructure connecting China’s western frontier and its Han heartland.<sup>55</sup> Reports of building of capacities on the border continued to appear in the late 2000s. In 2006, China announced the building of a rail line from Lhasa to Xigaze, close to the Indian border.<sup>56</sup> A report in IE claimed that New Delhi was caught napping by Beijing’s announcement that it was extending the Tibet rail line from Lhasa to Yadong, close to Nathu La in the strategic Chumbi valley on the Sino-Indian border.<sup>57</sup> Delhi had been dithering over proposals for rail links in Sikkim. Even so, any project undertaken by China to improve hinterland connectivity within its own sovereign territory cannot be challenged by India.

China was reported to have raised constructions along the international border in the Karakoram ranges in the Ladakh sector for the first time since the 1962 war with India.<sup>58</sup> Such construction could be used either for stationing additional personnel or mounting a camera to monitor Indian troop movement. Again in 2009, China was said to have been developing a railway line from Dali to Ruili on the China-Myanmar border and was planning to extend the Qinghai-Tibet railway line to connect Lhasa with Khasha on China-Nepal border.<sup>59</sup>

Construction of road links by India picked up in 2006, according to the newspaper reports, after its Cabinet Committee on Security, chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, cleared the construction of 608 km of roads along the India-China border.<sup>60</sup> The report said India had come out of its “defensive mindset” of letting old roads fall into disuse

and refraining from building new ones. (The earlier approach was fuelled by the apprehension that China could use those roads to make quick inroads in the event of a military assault.). In the same year, India also gave the go-ahead to an INR 6,000 crore project to build another two-lane all-weather road besides the existing one connecting Jammu to Srinagar.<sup>61</sup> India was reported to have reactivated a crucial airbase in Ladakh barely 20 km from the Chinese border. It also gave the green-light for construction of four strategic roads along the China border, which are expected to radically improve India's ability to induct troops and reinforcements promptly.

Work on rail links too moved forward in 2014 when India took up construction of four top priority strategic railway lines along the China border.<sup>62</sup> The 1,000 km of lines identified by the defence ministry were Missamari-Tawang (378 km) in Assam, Parashuram Kund- Rupai (256 km) in Assam-Arunachal Pradesh and Bilaspur-Mandi-Manali-Leh (498 km) in Himachal Pradesh-Jammu and Kashmir.

There were two incidents relating to reinforcement of troops by India in 2011 and two again in 2013. In 2011, India decided to increase the number of troops posted on the border by 90,000 in the next five years.<sup>63</sup> The reinforcement was part of the defence ministry's INR 64,000 crore military modernisation plan and included two new divisions of mountain strike corps. The other such event of 2011 was the announcement by the ITBP that it would deploy more forces on the LAC by setting up 35 new outposts.

The 50,000 additional troops were finally added in 2013.<sup>64</sup> The only instance of reinforcement of troops by China was when the PLA in 2010 was said to have deployed an infantry battalion at the Kunjerab Pass on the Karakoram highway in August, for security of workers engaged in building a railroad that would connect Xinjiang to Gwadar port in Balochistan.<sup>65</sup> The troop deployments were all in conflict with Article III

of the 1993 Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the LAC in the India-China Border Areas which says, “Each side will keep its military forces in the areas along the line of actual control to a minimum level compatible with the friendly and good neighbourly relations between the two countries”.<sup>66</sup> But while discussing this clause of the agreement, it must be noted that no numbers were mentioned in the 1993 agreement and what constituted the “minimum level” had remained undefined.

The only military exercises by India on the border were reported in 2012 when the 33 Corps under the Eastern Command carried out such exercises in India’s northeastern region to check military preparedness.<sup>67</sup> The only report of military exercises by China was the occasion when the PLA is said to have carried out an integrated ground-air combat military drill involving J-11 fighter jets and armed helicopters on the Tibetan Plateau.<sup>68</sup> This was the fourth such exercise by the Chinese military in Tibet since March to test its capacities in the region.

## CONCLUSION

On the basis of analysis of incidents and activities noted in this paper, some key characteristics of the Sino-Indian border can be identified. Unique Incidents reported (30) were far fewer than those attributed to statements made by government officials and quoted in the same newspapers. The maximum number of incidents was found in the Western Sector in general and the Ladakh-Tibet Autonomous Region Boundary area in particular. The Eastern Sector had the largest share of incidents in the initial period of the study from 2003 to 2008. Most aerial incidents reported in the Indian airspace were those of non-threatening digressions by Chinese helicopters. Except for the Daulat Beg Oldi and Chumar incidents that lasted for a length of time, most

incidents ended within hours of being detected and taken up by Indian border representatives with their Chinese counterparts.

Most responses that came were in the form of banner drills which were in conformity with the Standard Operating Measures prepared after the signing of the CBMs between the two countries. The two border incidents that needed diplomatic intervention, and which occurred despite the CBMs show that without a roadmap for a solution of the border issue it is difficult to ensure that the two countries will adhere to CBMs. It was also found that both the Daulat Beg Oldi and Chumar incidents that needed New Delhi's intervention were timed around high-level state visits; Chinese Premier Le Keqiang's visit to India in case of Daulat Beg Oldi and President Xi Jinping's visit on the eve of Chumar.

Deployment of defence apparatus topped the list of activities on the Sino-Indian border. Activities of deployment of armaments on the border included tanks, surface-to-surface missiles and combat aircraft. This deployment was found to be in contravention of the CBMs, which had called for a reduction of such armaments. The year 2009 saw the maximum number of activities reported on the border. India's upgrading of border infrastructure was reported to be a response to rail and road networks around the border built by China. Improved border infrastructure has given China strategic leverage for easily mobilising troops and armaments from interior regions to border areas.

This paper makes the following suggestions:

- There was a major discrepancy between the number of incidents reported in the newspapers (30) between the years 2003 and 2014 and the number of incidents (1,612) from 2010 to June 4, 2014, provided by Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju. Neither does the government elaborate on the figures nor do the

newspapers explain the discrepancy. There should be an explanation from the union government about this discrepancy. Citizens of India need to know how the figure of 1,612 was computed.

- The border dispute between India and China has dragged for more than six decades and it is in the interest of both sides that they come up with a position paper on the border issue.
- Given China's push for the Belt and Road Initiative, and given that its China Pakistan Economic Corridor project has already affected India's sovereignty claims in certain parts of Kashmir, it is incumbent upon India to bring the settlement of the India-China border issue to the forefront of its relationship with China. [ORF](#)

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