

India-China Relations 2025: Border Challenges, Trust Deficit & Renewed Engagement

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India-China Relations Latest News

- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to New Delhi marks the **first ministerial-level engagement from China** since the two countries agreed in October 2024 to disengage at the border.
- During his meeting with PM Modi, Wang acknowledged that **India-China relations have seen "ups and downs"**, stressing that the lessons learned from past experiences are worth remembering.
- His remarks suggest a cautious attempt at **resetting ties** while keeping in mind the sensitivities arising from recent border tensions.

India-China Ties: From Mahabalipuram to Re-engagement

- In October 2019, PM Modi and President Xi Jinping held their **second informal summit at Mahabalipuram**, symbolising optimism and warmth in bilateral ties.

- However, this optimism quickly faded. By June 2020, the violent Galwan Valley clash in Ladakh marked the worst military confrontation in decades, leading to the death of 20 Indian soldiers and at least four Chinese soldiers.
- This triggered a deep rupture in relations, with both sides amassing 50,000–60,000 troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and engaging in frequent confrontations while building infrastructure to consolidate their positions.
- Despite multiple rounds of military and diplomatic negotiations, disengagement remained partial, keeping relations strained.
- Progress began only in 2024, when both sides agreed to **complete disengagement in the remaining flashpoints of Depsang and Demchok**.
- This paved the way for a significant thaw, reinforced by a Modi-Xi meeting in Kazan in October 24, where both leaders decided to mend ties.
- Since then, there has been a renewed diplomatic momentum.

Wang Yi's Visit Amid Global Shifts and Renewed Outreach

- In the wake of Donald Trump's election as U.S. President, China braced for potential hostilities, signalling readiness for both friendship or confrontation.
- As Washington imposed tariffs on China — and later on India — Beijing sought to strengthen ties with New Delhi.
- This thaw led to the revival of the **Kailash Mansarovar Yatra** and resumption of **visa issuance to Chinese nationals**.
- Against this backdrop, Chinese Foreign Minister **Wang Yi visited India**, marking a significant gesture of outreach before PM Modi's upcoming visit to Tianjin for the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit**.
- Unlike in 2022, Wang secured a meeting with PM Modi during this trip, signalling improved diplomatic engagement between the two Asian giants.

Twin-Track Movement in India-China Relations

- India and China have agreed to simultaneously advance **border-related discussions** and **bilateral cooperation** without allowing one issue to obstruct the other.
- This twin-track approach, first adopted after **Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit**, had been followed until 2020 and is now being revived.

Border-Related Mechanisms

- **Expert Group on Boundary Delimitation** – An “Expert Group” under the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) will explore early harvest options in boundary delimitation.
- **Working Group on Border Management** – A new Working Group under WMCC will focus on effective border management, ensuring peace and stability in border areas.

- **Expanded General-Level Mechanisms** – General-level mechanisms will be expanded to include Eastern and Middle sectors in addition to the existing Western sector, with early meetings planned.
- Both sides acknowledged the need for a **political perspective** to achieve a fair, reasonable, and mutually acceptable framework for **boundary settlement**.
- India emphasised that the border situation directly influences overall bilateral ties.

Bilateral Engagements

- **Connectivity and Trade**
 - Agreement to resume direct flight connectivity at the earliest.
 - Facilitation of visas for tourists, businesses, media, and visitors.
 - Re-opening of border trade through designated points: Lipulekh Pass, Shipki La Pass, and Nathu La Pass.
 - Promotion of **trade and investment flows** through concrete steps.
- **Trans-Border Rivers Cooperation**
 - China agreed to **share hydrological information during emergencies** on humanitarian grounds, enhancing cooperation on shared water resources.

Addressing the Trust Deficit in India-China Relations

- The trust deficit between India and China remains a major obstacle despite recent efforts at engagement.
- **Border Tensions** – Repeated Chinese incursions — Depsang (2013), Chumar (2014), Doklam (2017), and the ongoing Ladakh standoff — have eroded confidence.
 - Over 50,000 troops remain deployed in eastern Ladakh, making a time-bound roadmap for de-escalation and de-induction essential.
- **China-Pakistan Nexus** – China's military cooperation with Pakistan, including weapons supply and live intelligence during Operation Sindoor, has deepened Indian security concerns.
- **Water Security Risks** – China's construction of a mega dam on the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) threatens downstream states, raising alarm for India as a lower riparian country.
- **Terrorism Concerns** – India reiterated its strong opposition to cross-border terrorism, recalling that combating terrorism was a core objective of the SCO.
- **Economic Vulnerabilities** – China's export restrictions on rare earths, tunnel boring machines, and fertilisers directly impact India's industrial growth and food security.

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