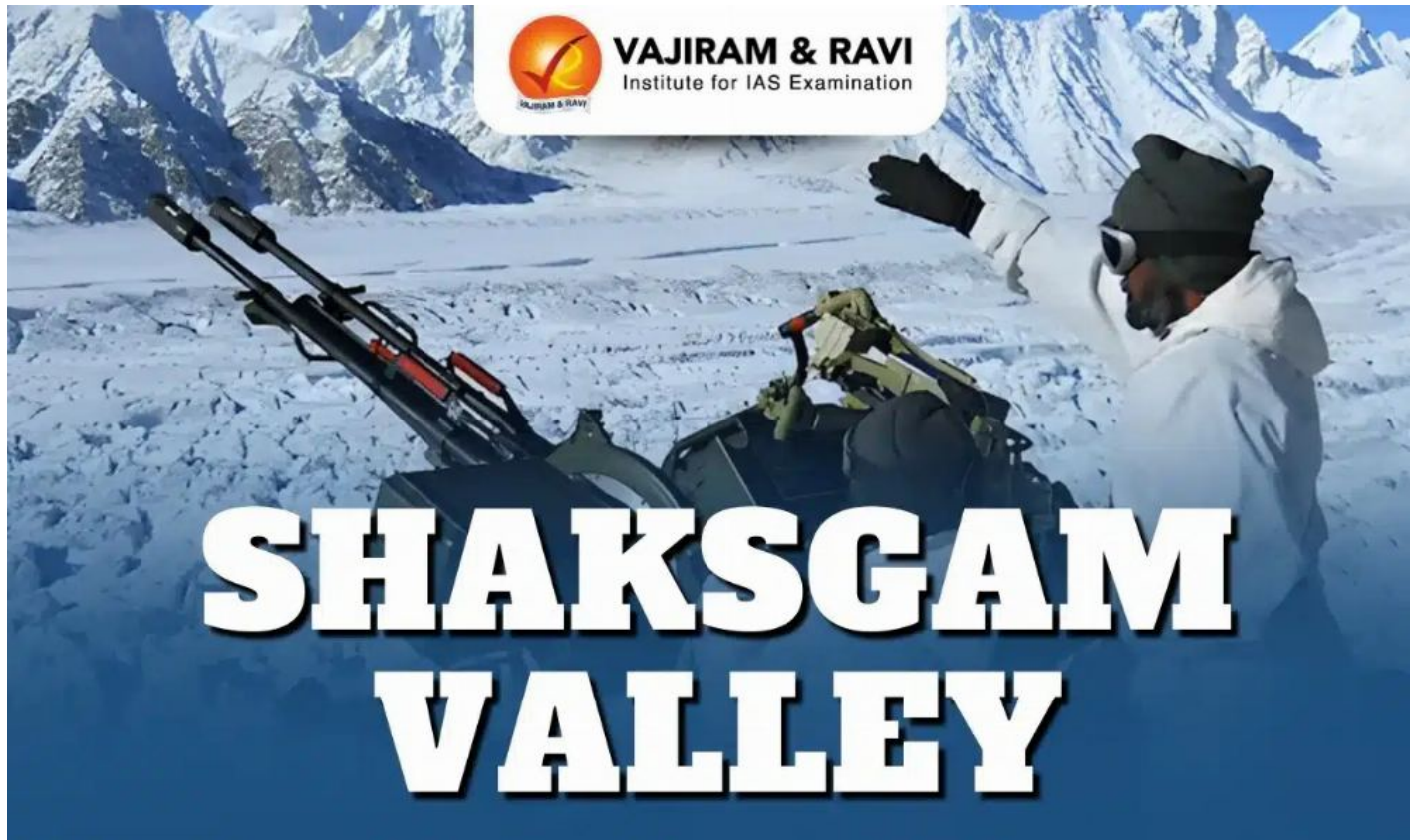


India-China Dispute Over Shaksgam Valley and Strategic Concerns

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Shaksgam Valley Latest News

- A fresh diplomatic and strategic tussle has emerged between India and China over the **Shaksgam Valley** in Jammu and Kashmir, reviving concerns despite the recent disengagement after the eastern Ladakh standoff.
- The Shaksgam Valley lies close to the **Siachen Glacier**, borders China's **Xinjiang** in the north, and **Pakistan-occupied Kashmir** in the south and west, making it highly sensitive for India's security.

Shaksgam Valley: Location and Strategic Context

- Shaksgam Valley, also known as the **Trans Karakoram Tract**, lies in the **Hunza-Gilgit region** under Pakistan's occupation, north of the Siachen Glacier.
- Covering over 5,000 sq km, its harsh terrain limits habitation.
- Although claimed by India, Pakistan controlled the area until 1963, while China earlier asserted influence by building a highway through Aksai Chin linking Tibet and Xinjiang.



Why Shaksgam Valley Is Strategically Important for India

- Shaksgam Valley holds critical importance for India due to its proximity to the **Siachen Glacier**, the world's highest battlefield, and its access to the **Karakoram Pass**.
- From Siachen, India can closely monitor Pakistan's military movements, while the Karakoram Pass allows observation of Chinese manoeuvres.
- As a result, developments in Shaksgam Valley have direct implications for India's security along both the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China and the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan.

China's Expanding Infrastructure Footprint

- Geostrategists have warned that China's "**salami slicing**" strategy in Shaksgam is nearing a tipping point.
 - China's "salami slicing" strategy is a tactic of achieving territorial expansion or greater influence through a series of small, incremental actions.
 - These actions individually seem minor but cumulatively create significant shifts in control, often in disputed areas.
- By mid-2024, China reportedly completed a road across the 4,805-metre **Aghil Pass** into Lower Shaksgam Valley, bringing Chinese construction teams—and potentially military patrols—within 50 km of India-controlled Siachen at Indira Col.

Emerging Two-Front Security Challenge

- Historically, India's defence focus in Siachen was oriented mainly toward Pakistan from the south.
- China's new access from the north alters this equation, raising the possibility of a two-front contingency on the world's highest battlefield and reinforcing India's concerns about China and Pakistan jointly pressuring Indian positions.

Pakistan's Cession of Shaksgam Valley to China

- **Historical Background** – Shaksgam Valley, part of the **Hunza-Gilgit region**, came under China's control in **1963** following a so-called boundary agreement with Pakistan. Although India objected, it never attempted physical occupation of the valley.
- **Colonial-Era Developments** – In 1936, under British influence, the **Mir of Hunza** surrendered rights over the Taghdumbash Pamir and Raskam Valley. However, Shaksgam Valley and the Aghil range remained under his control.
- **Post-Independence Legal Status** – After the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India in October 1947, Shaksgam Valley legally became Indian territory. India, however, could not exercise control due to Pakistan's forcible occupation of adjoining areas.
- **China's Entry and Pakistan's Calculus** – During the 1950s, China began moving into eastern Hunza, worsening India-China relations. Sensing an opportunity, Pakistan under President Ayub Khan sought closer ties with China, disregarding Indian concerns.
- **The 1963 Boundary Agreement** – In 1963, Pakistan formally ceded the Yarkand River region and Shaksgam Valley to China, despite lacking legal authority to transfer Indian territory.
- **Present-Day Security Implications** – Since the Doklam standoff, China has intensified military infrastructure development in Shaksgam Valley. As a result, a region that legally belongs to India has emerged as a significant security challenge for New Delhi.

China's Infrastructure Push and Indian Concerns

- China has reportedly completed nearly 75 km of an all-weather road, around 10 metres wide, in the valley.
- The infrastructure development—linked to the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor**—has raised Indian concerns about China and Pakistan jointly pressuring Indian positions in the region.

India's Response

- India maintains that Pakistan illegally ceded 5,180 sq km of the Shaksgam Valley to China under a 1963 agreement, which New Delhi has never recognised.
- The territory was part of Jammu and Kashmir under Pakistan's illegal occupation.
- The Ministry of External Affairs asserted that Shaksgam Valley is Indian territory and stated that India reserves the right to take "necessary measures" to safeguard its interests.

China's Position and Contradictions

- China has rejected India's objections, claiming its construction activities are legitimate.
- However, this stance exposes a contradiction: while China calls Kashmir a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan, it continues strategic development in areas of Kashmir under Pakistan's illegal occupation.
- The episode underscores continuing geopolitical tensions in the western sector of the India-China boundary and highlights growing concerns over China's strategic footprint in disputed regions, even as disengagement efforts continue elsewhere.

Source: IT | FE | IE