



Chinese Bridge on Pangong Tso

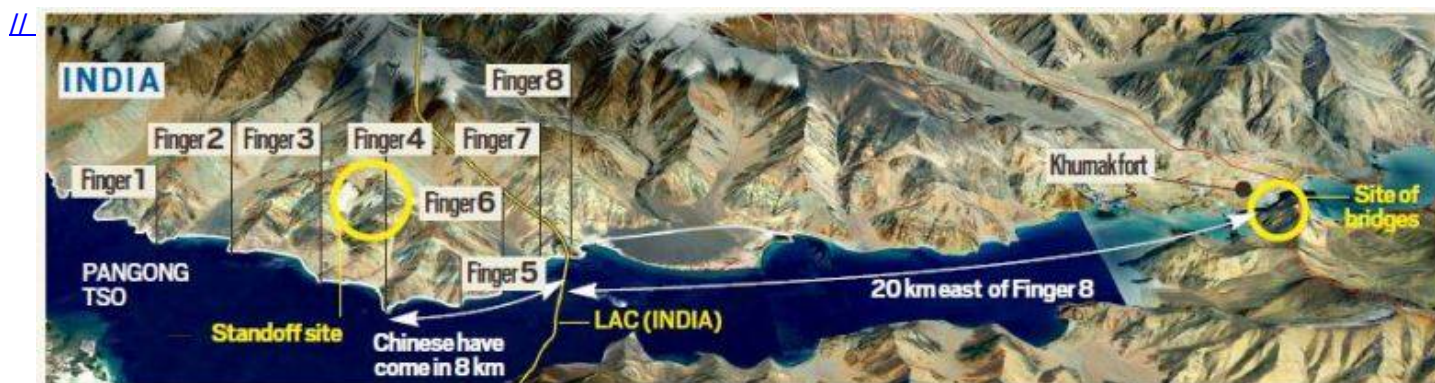
For Prelims: India-China Standoff, Pangong Tso Lake, Line of Actual Control, Kailash Range

For Mains: China's Building Bridge across Pangong Tso Lake, its implication for India, Background of India-China Standoff

Why in News?

Recently, the Ministry of External Affairs has confirmed that China is building a second bridge on the [Pangong Tso lake](#).

- The site of the bridge is **around 20 km east of Finger 8 on the lake's north bank** - where the [Line of Actual Control \(LAC\)](#) passes.
- However, the actual distance by road is more than 35 km between the bridge site and Finger 8.



What are the Key Points?

- The construction site is just **east of Khurnak Fort**, where **China has major frontier defence bases**.
- China calls it **Rutong Country**.
- It has a frontier defence company at the Khurnak Fort, and further east, a water squadron deployed at Banmozhang.
- Although it is being built in territory that is under China's control since 1958, the exact point is just west of India's claim line.
- The Ministry of External Affairs considers the area as illegally occupied by China.

How will these Constructions Help China?

- The bridges are at one of the narrowest points on the lake, close to the LAC.
- These constructions will connect both sides of the lake, which would significantly cut down time for

the **People's Liberation Army (PLA)** to move troops and armored vehicles.

- The induction of troops from the **G219 highway (Chinese national highway)** would come down by 130 km due to this bridge.

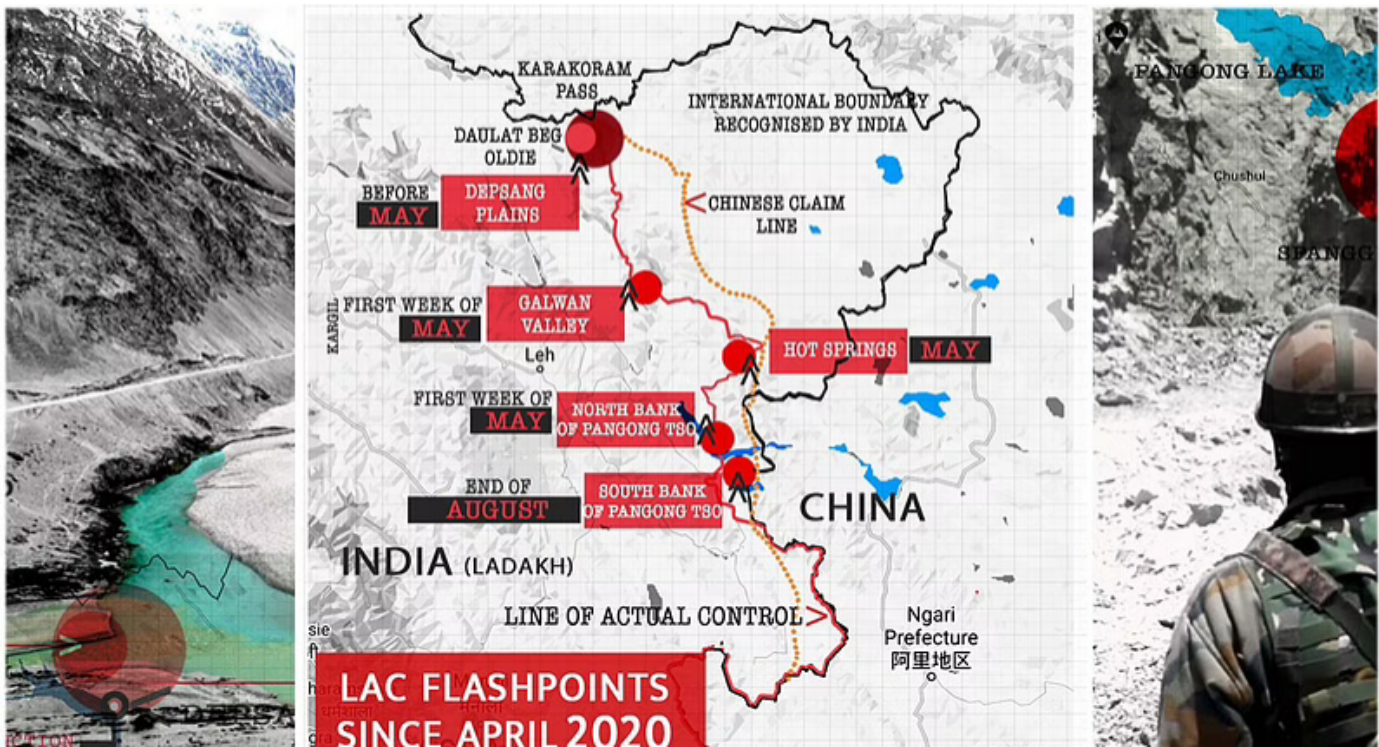
Pangong Tso

- Pangong Tso is a 135-km long landlocked lake located at an altitude of over 14,000 feet i.e., 4350 m above sea level.
- Indian and China have around one-third and two-thirds of Pangong Tso Lake respectively.
 - India has around 45 km of Pangong Tso under its control while approximately 60% of the lake, in terms of length, lies in China,
 - The eastern end of Pangong Tso lies in Tibet.
- The lake, a glacial melt, has mountain spurs of the Chang Chenmo range jetting down, referred to as **fingers**.
- It is **one of the highest altitude lakes** in the world that is filled with **saline water**.
 - However, even though it is a saline water lake, Pangong Tso freezes completely.
 - The brackish water of this region has very low micro-vegetation.
 - No aquatic life or fish, except crustaceans during winters are found.
- It is a kind of **endorheic basin**, which implies that **it retains its water and does not allow outflow of its water to other external water bodies**, such as oceans and rivers.
- Pangong Tso is **popular for its changing colour** ability.
 - Its colour changes from shades of **blue to green to red**.

Why does China choose this location?

- The constructions are a direct outcome of the ongoing standoff that began in May 2020.
- The location is the consequence of an operation conducted by the Indian Army in August 2020 where Indian troops outmaneuvered the People's Liberation Army to occupy the heights of **Kailash Range** in the Chushul sub-sector on the south bank of Pangong Tso.
- The positions allowed India to dominate the strategically significant Spanggur Gap, which could be used to launch an offensive as China had done in 1962.
- Also, India got a direct view of **China's Moldo Garrison (China's military base)**. **This was a cause of immense concern for the Chinese.**
- After this operation, the Indian Army also readjusted on the lake's north bank to position themselves above Chinese positions.
- The **north bank** was one of the first friction points to have come up in May 2020.
 - During this jostling, warning shots were fired for the first time by both sides, a first in over four decades.
- New bridge will allow Chinese troops to slash travel time from around 12 hours at the moment to around four hours.

What is the current situation in the standoff?



- India and China pulled their troops back from Patrolling Point (PP) 14 in Galwan Valley in June 2020, after the fatal clashes.
- Then they disengaged from the north and south banks of Pangong Tso in February 2021, and from PP17A near Gogra Post in August. But negotiations have been stuck since then.
- The Corps Commanders from both sides have met 15 times since the standoff began.
- The dates for the next round of talks are still awaited.

What has been India's response?

- India is monitoring all Chinese activity closely.
- India has never accepted such illegal occupation and the unjustified Chinese claim or such construction activities in India's territory.
- India is also upgrading and developing infrastructure along the northern border.
- In 2021, over 100 projects were completed by the [Border Roads Organisation \(BRO\)](#) in the border areas, most of which were close to the China border.
- India is **also improving surveillance** along the LAC.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question

Q. Siachen Glacier is situated to the (2020)

- East of Aksai Chin
- East of Leh
- North of Gilgit
- North of Nubra Valley

Ans: (d)

Exp:

- The Siachen Glacier is located in the Eastern Karakoram range in the Himalayas, just northeast of Point NJ9842 where the Line of Control between India and Pakistan ends.
- It has the distinction of being the largest glacier outside the polar and subpolar regions.
- It lies to the west of Aksai Chin, north of Nubra valley and almost east of Gilgit. Therefore, option

(d) is the correct answer

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