

# Inception Day Lecture

**Topic:** ‘Border Clashes between India and China: Geopolitical and Theoretical Perspectives’

**Speaker:** Dr. Bhartendu Kumar Singh

**Date:** 10 January 2023



## Key Takeaways

The Centre for East Asian Studies (CEAS) organized its Inception Day Lecture on “Border Clashes between India and China: Geopolitical and Theoretical Perspectives”. The speaker was Dr Bhartendu Kumar Singh, Joint Controller General of Defence Accounts, Office of Controller General of Defence Accounts, Government of India.

Dr Bhartendu began by introducing the issue of border clashes between India-China and the McMahon Line’s inception, giving way to the issues between the two countries today.

He explained how the problem was aggravated by the Chinese annexation of Tibet and the differing opinions between the Chinese, Tibetans, and Indians. Being subsumed under the Line of Actual Control rubric, he further explained how the conflict over McMahon Line/LAC and its failure to define it properly has led to increasing border clashes between the two territories.

Beginning in the 1950s, he traced the conflicts and incursions between the two countries over the disputed borders. He divided the border into three distinct sectors: The western sector, which consists of Aksai Chin; the Central Sector, consisting of marginal pieces of land bordering Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand; and the Eastern Sector of McMahon Line which borders Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

Dr Bhartendu then discussed various perspectives about border clashes and the official stand of both countries. India's official, as well as the unofficial stance of projecting their differing perceptions of LAC on the border issue, while China follows the same from their side. He then brought in various perspectives such as the Great Power Perspective (as India and China are great powers to an extent and neighbors, their relationship is bound to be conflictual), Military Power Perspective (the view that China induces the conflict to show off its military prowess), and Infrastructural Game Perspective (both countries building infrastructure adjacent to the LAC territory to secure it better).

He then began to explain the border clashes between China and India from the prism of history, beginning from the 1959 clash in Longju, Aksai Chin, the 1986 Sumdurong Chu standoff, and the following 1993 Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the LAC signed between the Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and his Chinese counterpart Li Peng. A potential for solving the border issues came with the 2005 Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question, a direct result of the Special Representative (SR) Mechanism established in 2003.

He shifted to the more recent clashes of Galwan and Tawang and explored them individually. For the 2020 Galwan clash, he focused on why it was a departure in military relations. The Galwan clash marked the first time massive casualties between the two sides. It changed the prevalent idea that LAC was a peaceful border with only verbal conversations and that China was a satisfied party in the border dispute. It showed the three theatres of possible war and changed the idea that China and India are unlikely to go to war. As India's coalitions with powers like the UK, US, and Russia also remained neutral, it became a fight that India had to fight on its own. Moving the 2022 Tawang clashes showed that the entire arc of LAC matters to China and not just any particular sector. It also emphasized that border clashes are here to stay and only increase in frequency and intensity, which requires the Indian government to develop a response mechanism. Using its deceptive military strategy, the Chinese army may also look for more "hot spots" to attack and claim borderlands.

He also focused on the status of bilateral relations between India and China, noting that it has been the lowest since 1962, and also said India's openness to attempts of balancing relations and coalition-building exercises. Speaking on the future of bilateral relations, he spoke on the possibility that China's and India's recent military trends might result in war probabilities and the possible results of it. Concluding the lecture, he said that the question of war looms over India and China, especially with military confidence vis-a-vis China.

## Q & A

After the lecture, the students posed questions to the speaker on India's national security policy, the changes in the government in understanding China better, and the problem of Ghost Villages in the border areas. More questions on the two-front war faced by India and its preparedness were also asked, which Dr Bhartendu Kumar Singh answered enthusiastically and perceptively.

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