EDITORIAL 1: IN THE SHORT TERM, STABILISE THE LINE OF ACTUAL CONTROL

CONTEXT

▪ For the last few years, the situation on the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** has continued to remain extremely tense; it has just stopped short of a war, with the Doklam and Galwan crises.

LINE OF ACTUAL CONTROL (LAC)

▪ The Line of Actual Control (LAC), in the context of the Sino-Indian border dispute, is a notional demarcation line that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory.

▪ The LAC is different from the borders claimed by each country in the Sino-Indian border dispute. The Indian claims include the entire **Aksai Chin region and the Chinese claims include Zangnan (South Tibet)/Arunachal Pradesh.** These claims are not included in the concept of "actual control".

▪ The LAC is generally divided into three sectors:

▪ the **western sector** between Ladakh on the Indian side and the Tibet and Xinjiang autonomous regions on the Chinese side; the **middle sector** between Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh on the Indian side and the Tibet autonomous region on the Chinese side; the **eastern sector** between Zangnan(South Tibet)/Arunachal Pradesh on the Indian side and the Tibet autonomous region on the Chinese side. This sector generally follows the McMahon Line.

AGREEMENTS AND INADEQUACIES

▪ The India-China engagement got an impetus after the visit by then Indian Prime Minister to China in December 1988.

▪ Since then, four agreements have been signed between the two countries (in 1993, 1996, 2005 and 2013) to maintain peace along the LAC, laying the framework for dealing with the border issue and covering the spectrum of

engagement from the highest levels of government to border personnel meetings in the field.

- For more than two decades, these arrangements have served their purpose well. However, the heightened tension on the LAC suggests that there are inadequacies in the agreements.

- The current mindset among the Indian security establishment is to be "unyielding" with China as it is felt that the "salami slicing tactics " of the Chinese must be halted.

- While firmness is essential, there is also a need to identify the reasons for rising clashes on the LAC and working on solutions.

- The opinion is that aggression is not the only reason for the rise in LAC incidents; the quantum jump in surveillance technology provides visibility of movement of opposing forces in areas that were blind spots earlier.

- This coupled with increased troop density, better roads, improved logistics and availability of aviation assets enhance the reaction capability, thereby increasing the face-offs and clashes.

SUGGESTIONS

- **Converting the LAC into a Line of Control (LC)** by delineating it on the map and on the ground without prejudice to border claims. This will reduce the urge among the forward troops to inch forward. This may seem difficult but can be implemented with a display of maturity by both sides and with the use of technology.

- Further, it needs to build **robust Infrastructure** in difficult border areas in its territory to ensure movement of personnel and other logistical supplies in an efficient manner.

- Border troops should continue their dialogue, quickly disengage, maintain proper distance and ease tensions.

- The two sides should **abide by all the existing agreements and protocols** on China-India boundary affairs and avoid any action that could escalate matters.

- The disputed areas on the LAC **can be treated as no entry zones**; alternatively, both sides should be allowed to patrol these areas as per a mutually agreed frequency.

- **Joint patrolling** of the disputed areas must also be explored as this can result in the maintenance of status quo and an increase in confidence.

- **Existing Confidence Building Measures and engagement mechanisms** need to be strengthened so that local issues can be resolved quickly.

CONCLUSION

- The complexity of the India-China border problem precludes a permanent solution on an immediate basis. Thus, it is better that both sides consider taking short-term but effective and pragmatic steps to stabilise the LAC, reducing the possibilities of a conflict.

EDITORIAL 2: TRAGIC TRACK
CONTEXT

- The rail accident in Balasore in Odisha on June 2, involving the collision of three trains, is a tragic reminder of the challenges that India faces in modernising and expanding its rail services.

BACKGROUND

- At least 275 people were killed and over 900 injured when the Shalimar-Chennai Coromandel Express, the Yesvantpur-Howrah Express and a freight train collided in the worst rail accident in two decades.

- The impact caused the passenger train's coaches to derail and hit another passenger train travelling in the opposite direction.

- The preliminary investigation suggests that a technical glitch with the signalling system may have been the reason for the accident.

- The Railways authorities have identified the root cause and responsible parties and are taking steps to rectify the issue. This tragic incident highlights the ongoing challenges of rail safety in India and the need for improvements to prevent such accidents in the future.

THE LAPSES IN INDIAN RAILWAY SAFETY

- **Derailments** have been a major cause of train accidents in India. Lapses in safety protocols, track maintenance, and failure to identify and rectify track defects have resulted in derailments.

- **Train collisions** have occurred due to lapses in signalling systems, human errors, and failure to maintain safe distances between trains.

- Lapses in ensuring the safety of **level crossings** have led to accidents involving trains and road vehicles.

- **Malfunctioning or improper signalling systems** have been responsible for train accidents.

- **Overcrowding of trains beyond their capacity and overspeeding** have also led to accidents. Lack of proper crowd management and failure to enforce speed limits have been significant safety concerns.

IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY MEASURES

- **High volume of passengers:** With a massive population and millions of people relying on the railways for their daily commute, ensuring the safety of Indian Railways becomes crucial.

- **Economic impact:** Indian Railways is a crucial component of the country's transportation infrastructure and plays a vital role in the economy.

- **Reputation and public trust:** The safety of Indian Railways is essential to maintain the public's trust and confidence in the system.

- **International comparison:** Safety standards in Indian Railways are often compared with those of developed countries. Countries like Japan, China, and several European nations have demonstrated that high safety standards are achievable.

- **Connectivity**: Indian Railways is a lifeline for connectivity, ensuring people from various regions can travel and access opportunities for economic growth.

- **Regulatory compliance**: Safety is a regulatory requirement and a legal obligation for Indian Railways.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

- **Kavach system**: KAVACH is an indigenously developed Automatic Train Protection(ATP) System for Indian Railways.

- **Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK)**: The government initiated the RRSK in 2017-18, a dedicated fund aimed at carrying out safety-related work in a systematic manner.

- **Project Mission Raftar**: It is an Indian Railway project, introduced in the Railway Budget of 2016-17 and approved by NITI Aayog in 2017. The goal is to double the average speed of freight trains and increase passenger train speed by 50%.

- **Upgradation of infrastructure:** The government has been investing significant funds in the modernization and upgradation of railway infrastructure. This includes the electrification of railway lines, the expansion of rail networks, and the introduction of high-speed and ultra-high-speed lines, such as the Vande Bharat Express.

- **Implementation of safety measures:** Efforts have been made to implement safety measures across the railway network. These include the installation of fire and smoke detection systems in coaches, the provision of fire extinguishers, and the development of technologies like the Kavach application that aids locomotive pilots in triggering the brake system automatically.

- **Elimination of manned level crossings:** The government has been working towards the elimination of manned level crossings, which are prone to accidents. Efforts are being made to replace them with underpasses, overpasses, and other safety measures to enhance railway safety.

- **Audit reports and recommendations:** The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) periodically conducts audits of Indian Railways, identifying shortcomings and making recommendations to address safety concerns. These reports serve as a basis for corrective actions and improvements in safety protocols.

SUGGESTIONS

- Conduct thorough investigations.

- Strengthen maintenance practices.

- Allocate sufficient funding.

- Enhance staffing and training.

- Implement advanced technologies.

- Prioritize safety as a culture.

CONCLUSION

- The Indian Railways carries nearly 15 million passengers every day now compared to the peak of 23 million a day the year before the COVID-19 pandemic. Sabotage is not ruled out in the Balasore accident, which will be probed by the Central Bureau of Investigation. More important will be the corrective measures by the Railways at the operational and planning levels. It will have to find more resources to modernise and rationalise its priorities.

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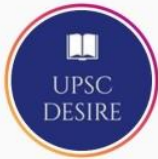
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