

DEFENCE INFRA PUSH UNDERWAY IN LADAKH AMID CHINA STANDOFF

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2022 **BY** INDIAN DEFENCE NEWS



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The Indian Army is building infrastructure at a rapid pace in eastern Ladakh with a focus on better living experience and improved facilities for soldiers, conservation of modern weapons and equipment deployed there, and supporting faster movement of men and material to deal with any contingency in the midst of the lingering border standoff with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the sensitive sector, officials familiar with the development said on Tuesday.

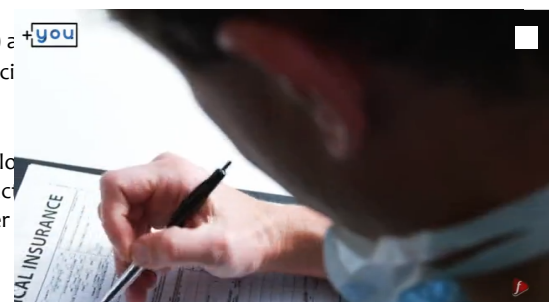
India has inducted thousands of extra troops and modern military weaponry into the Ladakh sector to counter the Chinese military build-up after the standoff began two and a half years ago. The altered dynamic along the contested Line of Actual Control (LAC) necessitated the infrastructure push aimed at enhancing efficiency of the army's deployments, said one of the officials cited above, who asked not to be named.

The steps taken by the army to support its forward deployments along LAC include building of modular shelters for troops deployed at heights of up to 18,000 feet, habitat for reserve troops in rear locations, storage facilities for tanks, artillery guns and other equipment, underground facilities for ammunition storage, airfields, and new roads, bridges and tunnels in difficult terrain for improved connectivity with forward areas.

The army has also built ponds in high altitude areas in Ladakh to provide drinking water to troops.

Infrastructure is not only coming up in Ladakh but also in the central (Uttarakhand) and eastern sectors (Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh) to cater to the army's needs and build capacity with emerging challenges, said a second official.

"It's very heartening to see the push being given to infrastructure development along the altitudes at which the LAC lies, the quality of infrastructure will be a key factor for peacetime border management and war," said former Northern Army commander General DS Hooda (Retd).



To be sure, PLA has significantly modernised defence infrastructure across LAC after the standoff began in May 2020.

The Indian Army's infrastructure push comes alongside concerted efforts to upgrade military capability with a variety of weapons and systems including artillery guns, swarm drone systems that can carry out offensive missions in enemy territory, longer range rockets, remotely piloted aerial systems and high-mobility protected vehicles. The army is also pursuing the development of light tanks for mountain warfare and futuristic infantry combat vehicles (FICVs), as previously reported.

In January 2022, former army chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane said the silver lining to the border crisis was that India used it as an opportunity to fast-track infrastructure development, undertake doctrinal reviews and fill operational voids through emergency purchases.

On Tuesday, the army sought proposals from domestic vendors for 180 canister-launched anti-armour loiter systems under the emergency procurement route, and integrated drone detection and interdiction systems, the officials said.

Last week, the army said it will construct modular, 3D-printed, next generation bunkers to provide better protection to front-line soldiers guarding the country's border with China. These bunkers will come up near LAC in Ladakh next year onwards, and will be able to withstand a direct hit by a tank shell.

It is also heartening that the latest technology like 3D printing and pre-engineered buildings is being utilised for creating defences and habitat, Hooda said. "At the minimum, it will halve the construction time," he added. While 20-odd 3D-printed bunkers have already been made, the army will construct hundreds of such bunkers in Ladakh and the numbers will gradually increase.

Despite four rounds of disengagement from Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso, Gogra (PP-17A) and Hot Springs (PP-15), the Indian and Chinese armies still have more than 60,000 troops each and advanced weaponry deployed in the Ladakh theatre. The Indian and Chinese armies have held 16 rounds of talks so far, but problems at Depsang in Daulet Beg Oldi sector and Charding Nullah Junction (CNJ) in Demchok sector are still on the negotiating table.

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