Pangong Tso and its fingers

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In News: China’s fortified deployments on Finger 5 proved to be the most contentious part of the negotiations to chart out a mutually acceptable troop withdrawal plan for Pangong Tso.

About Pangong Tso Lake

- It is formed from Tethys geosyncline.
- It is a salt water lake.
- Pangong Tso Lake in eastern Ladakh has often been in the news, most famously during the Doklam standoff, when a video of the scuffle between Indian and Chinese soldiers.
- In the Ladakhi language, Pangong means extensive concavity, and Tso is a lake in Tibetan.
- Pangong Tso is a long narrow, deep, endorheic (landlocked) lake situated at a height of more than 14,000 ft in the Ladakh Himalayas.
- The western end of Tso lies 54 km to the southeast of Leh. The 135 km-long lake sprawls over 604 sq km in the shape of a boomerang and is 6 km wide at its broadest point.
- The brackish water lake freezes over in winter and becomes ideal for ice skating and polo.
- The legendary 19th century Dogra general Zorawar Singh is said to have trained his soldiers and horses on the frozen Pangong lake before invading Tibet.

Why dispute?

- The Line of Actual Control (LAC) – the line that separates Indian and Chinese troops since 1962 – generally runs along the land except for the width of Pangong Tso.
- Here it runs through water. Both sides have marked their areas announcing which side belongs to which country.
India controls about 45 km stretch of the Pangong Tso and China the rest.

The current site of confrontation is spurs jutting out of Chang Chenmo, an eastern extension of the Karakoram Range. These spurs are called fingers.

**Fingers in the lake**

- The barren mountains on the lake’s northern bank, called the Chang Chenmo, jut forward in major spurs, which the Army calls “fingers”.
- India claims that the LAC is coterminous with Finger 8, but it physically controls area only up to Finger 4.
- Chinese border posts are at Finger 8, while it believes that the LAC passes through Finger 2.
- Around six years ago, the Chinese had attempted a permanent construction at Finger 4 which was demolished after Indians strongly objected to it.
- Chinese use light vehicles on the road to patrol up to Finger 2, which has a turning point for their vehicles.
- If they are confronted and stopped by an Indian patrol in between, asking them to return, it leads to confusion, as the vehicles can't turn back.
- The Chinese have now stopped the Indian soldiers moving beyond Finger 2. This is an eyeball-to-eyeball situation.
which is still developing.