

# Indian troops on alert as border dispute with China heats up

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New Delhi: India is augmenting its military preparedness and infrastructural development along its 5,045km disputed frontier with neighbouring China in response to similarly heightened activity on the other side.

Official sources said India was making preparations to deploy its strategic Agni II intermediate-range ballistic missiles and Prithvi III surface-to-surface ballistic missiles to the Chinese border.

An unspecified number of missile units under the Strategic Forces Command, which controls India's nuclear arsenal, had recently been placed under the army's Eastern Command, which has responsibility for managing the Chinese threat.

These measures were planned in response to China moving its advanced, longer-range CSS-5 missiles to the Tibet region and developing contingency plans to shift airborne forces there at short notice.

The neighbours fought a bitter war in 1962 - in which India came off worse - over their unresolved border dispute.

China maintains the disputed area to be over 120,600sq km and to include Arunachal Pradesh province in northeastern India, a claim New Delhi dismisses.

Over the decades, there has been no indication of a resolution to these conflicting claims, despite continuing negotiations and the recent upswing in diplomatic, political, commercial and even fledgling military ties between the world's two most populous countries.

Tensions also persist along the undemarcated line of actual control, with India claiming frequent instances of increasingly aggressive border patrolling by the People's Liberation Army, including incursions deep into its territory in order to test its responses.

A Pentagon report on China's military status and ambitions had last month also warned against Beijing militarily reinforcing its borders with India, which, in turn, was preparing a riposte to these developments.

The Indian Air Force, for instance, plans to increase the number of Su-30MKI multi-role fighters at its base in Tezpur in Assam province, bordering Tibet.

Military sources said the Su-30MKI's radius of operation from Tezpur could be further enhanced by 5,000km to 8,000km with air-to-air refuelling by the air force's recently

acquired tankers to enable them to strike at targets deep inside China.

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