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The Harvest China Wants Is One India Cannot Afford

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 **The Hindu** 3 June 2026 **GS2**

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"India's China boundary talks face a structural asymmetry: China has made gains on the ground since April 2020 and now negotiates from that position. How should India calibrate its red lines?"

Settling the Sikkim sector alone lets China bank gains while Ladakh and Arunachal remain unresolved. India must hold to the 2005 PGP package-settlement framework and make pre-2020 LAC restoration non-negotiable.

THE ARGUMENT IN ONE LINE

Sectoral deals are China's harvest, not India's — the 2005 PGP framework demands a comprehensive package, and pre-2020 LAC status quo restoration is the non-negotiable threshold.

THE THREE-SECTOR FRAMEWORK (2005 PGP)

SECTOR	LOCATION	STATUS
Western	Aksai Chin / Ladakh	Most contested; April 2020 PLA incursions
Middle	HP / Uttarakhand	Relatively quiet
Eastern	Arunachal Pradesh	China claims as "South Tibet"
Sikkim	North Sikkim / Doklam area	Boundary clearer; China seeks "early harvest"

INDIA'S OFFICIAL STAND (MANDATORY GOI POSITION)

- **Aksai Chin, Arunachal Pradesh, J&K are integral parts of India.**
- India rejects any claim that delegitimises its sovereignty.

- **April 2020 status quo restoration** is non-negotiable in Depsang, Demchok, Gogra-Hot Springs.

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	RELEVANCE
GS2	India-China relations; LAC; PPGP 2005; Three-sector framework; Doklam; Galwan
Prelims	2005 PPGP; Three sectors (Western/Middle/Eastern); Depsang; Demchok; Aksai Chin (integral to India)

Sources: *The Hindu*, Ministry of External Affairs

Source: The Harvest China Wants Is One India Cannot Afford — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Agreeing to an “early harvest” settlement limited to the Sikkim sector would allow China to bank concrete boundary gains while leaving the Western (Ladakh) and Eastern (Arunachal) sectors unresolved, fundamentally weakening India’s comprehensive negotiating position — India must hold to the 2005 Political Parameters and Guiding Principles (PPGP) package-settlement framework and make restoration of the pre-2020 LAC status quo a non-negotiable precondition.

✓ SUPPORTING

- The 2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles (PPGP) explicitly frames the India-China boundary settlement as a comprehensive “package” covering all three sectors — Western (Aksai Chin/Ladakh), Middle (Himachal Pradesh/Uttarakhand), and Eastern (Arunachal Pradesh) — not piecemeal sectoral deals.
- Settling the Sikkim sector (where the boundary is relatively clearer) in isolation would allow China to remove one leverage point and focus diplomatic pressure on the Western and Eastern sectors from a position of advantage.

- India's non-negotiable position: Aksai Chin, Arunachal Pradesh, and Jammu & Kashmir are integral parts of India; any settlement that legitimises China's post-2020 LAC encroachments would violate this position.

COUNTER

Some argue that an "early harvest" in the least-disputed sector could build trust and momentum, reducing overall bilateral tension, and that insisting on comprehensive package settlement is a recipe for perpetual stalemate.

WAY FORWARD

Maintain the 2005 PPGP framework as the foundation; make restoration of the pre-April 2020 LAC status quo in Depsang, Demchok, and Gogra-Hot Springs a precondition for any sectoral or comprehensive deal; strengthen infrastructure in border areas as strategic leverage; and keep diplomatic channels open while not yielding tactical ground.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

"Sectoral boundary settlements with China risk locking in asymmetric gains at India's expense." Critically examine India's boundary negotiation strategy. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

The India-China boundary dispute has three distinct sectors with different levels of clarity and controversy. China's April 2020 incursions in eastern Ladakh fundamentally changed the negotiating landscape — India now must recover the pre-2020 status quo before any comprehensive settlement can be credible.

BODY

The 2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles established the conceptual framework for a comprehensive boundary settlement: both sides agreed that the settlement must be

“fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable” covering all sectors as a package. This is the legal and political anchor for India’s negotiating position.

The suggestion of an “early harvest” — settling the Sikkim sector where the boundary is clearer and Chinese pressure is less intense — appears to offer quick diplomatic wins. But it would allow China to lock in the resolution of one sector while retaining leverage in the Western sector (Ladakh, where post-2020 encroachments gave China tactical advantages) and the Eastern sector (where China insists on Arunachal as “South Tibet”).

India’s position — per the Government of India’s official stand — is that Aksai Chin, Arunachal Pradesh, and J&K are integral parts of India; no boundary settlement can cede these. A sectoral deal that removes the Sikkim pressure point without restoring the Depsang/Demchok/Gogra-Hot Springs status quo would be a negotiating retreat, not progress.

CONCLUSION

India’s boundary negotiation wisdom lies in patience and infrastructure investment, not in accepting early harvests that reduce its comprehensive leverage. The 2005 PGP framework is the right frame; within it, restoration of the pre-2020 LAC status quo is the minimum threshold before any broader negotiation can produce a durable, balanced outcome.

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