

# CHINESE ARMY'S TRANSGRESSIONS COME DOWN AS FLAG MEETS RISE

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**NEW DELHI:** The number of transgressions by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) thus far this year along the 3,488 km Line of Actual Control (LAC) has dropped by at least 20% from 2017, with the Chinese and Indian Armies holding more flag meetings to peacefully resolve boundary issues, two senior army officials familiar with the matter said on condition of anonymity, underlining the growing warmth in the relationship between the two countries after the Doklam standoff last year.

There is increased PLA activity in Demchok in Eastern Ladakh across the LAC, the officials admit, but both Indian Army and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) have noticed the drop in incursions from the Chinese side, particularly after the April 27-28 informal summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and China's paramount leader Xi Jinping at Wuhan.

As per records, there have been around 118 PLA incursions this year, a drop from the same period in 2017.

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## China's army

The other significant achievement of Wuhan is that the behaviour of both armies in the LAC is no longer as aggressive as it used to be, the officials said.

Hindustan Times learns that the Indian Army has told the visiting PLA delegation led by Lt Gen Liu Xiaowu of Western Theatre Command that it is ready to participate in the "hand in hand" annual counter-terrorism exercise in China towards the end of the year and has left it to PLA headquarters to propose the dates. The exercise did not take place last year due to the 73-day standoff between the two armies on the Doklam plateau in Bhutan.

While Prime Minister Modi will meet his Chinese counterpart both at the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) summit in South Africa in July and the East Asia summit in Singapore in November, the Wuhan understanding has set the cooperative agenda between the two nations.

The build-up to the path-breaking Wuhan summit took place at the Astana SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) summit on June 8, 2017, when PM Modi decided to take things in his own hands and reach out to President Xi with a proposal of the apex leadership driving the tedious relationship. PM Modi made it known that if both President Xi and he speak from writ-

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ten notes given by the mandarins, then it is the notes that would do the talking and not the leaders. China experts confirmed to Hindustan Times that PM Modi singularly reached out to President Xi who directly responded within a day saying that he was open to dialogue with the Indian leader.

Even when the tense Doklam standoff was on from June to August last year, the Indian leadership was assured that President Xi's word would prevail and the crisis would not result in a military skirmish. At the G-20 summit in Germany in July 2017, PM Modi again reached out to President Xi and the two leaders gave categorical instructions to the national security planners that the standoff should be resolved diplomatically. The informal summit between the two leaders was delayed due to President Xi's preoccupation with the Communist Party Congress and then PM Modi's focus on the Gujarat assembly elections. The Wuhan understanding, according to top national security experts, is not a compromise but a resolve that both countries will not needle each other on core national issues, maintain peace on the LAC with each side being allowed to build border infrastructure, and yet cooperate at a bilateral and global level on issues of convergence such as trade and climate change.