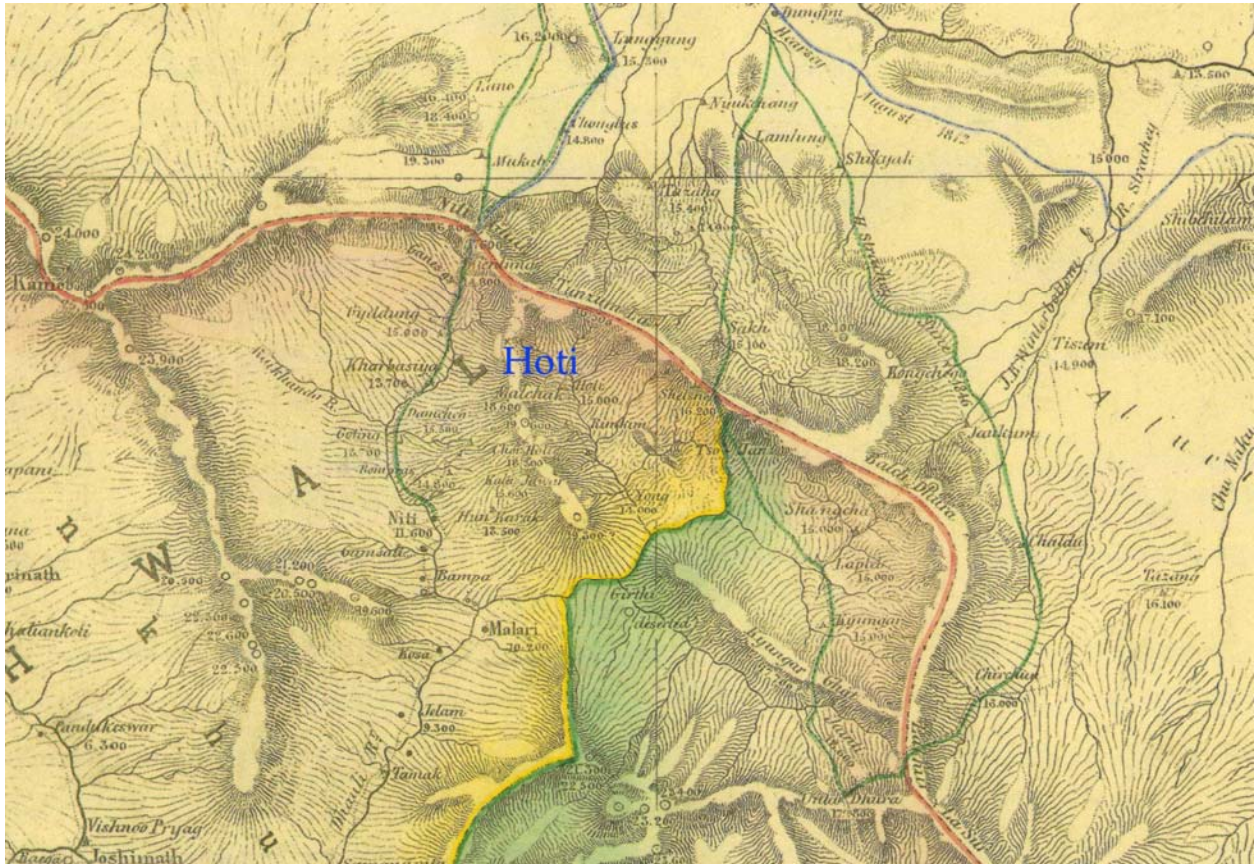


The History of Barahoti Plain

Claude Arpi



The Traditional Boundary

On November 20, 1950, during a question and answer session in the Parliament, Prime Minister Nehru was asked: "Will the Prime Minister be pleased to state whether India has got any well-defined boundary with Tibet?"

His answer was: "The border from Ladakh to Nepal has probably not been the subject of any formal agreement between India, Tibet and China but it is well established by custom and long usage. The Historical Division are investigating if there are any formal agreements. There have been a few boundary disputes in this area but they have been peacefully settled."

It is a historical fact that the Indo-Tibet frontier had been peaceful. It is probably why the Indian diplomats who four years later negotiated the Panchsheel Agreement foolishly 'forgot' to mention the border during the talks (and in the final text). India would pay dearly for this lapse.

Over the years, China have kept changing the posts, claiming new areas, often not knowing the coordinates of the places.

To give one example: in the course of the meetings of the Officials of India and China in 1960, both parties presented their claims for the Central Sector (today's Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand).

The Indian report said that the Nilang-Jadhang area and Barahoti, Sangchamalla and Lapthal were clubbed together for discussion.

At the 15th meeting at Peking on July 18, 1960, while answering the question of the Indian side, the Chinese side stated that Barahoti (Wu-je), Sangchamalla and Lapthal formed one composite area on the Chinese side of the alignment claimed by them, and there was no Indian territory wedged between these three pockets. This was a new claim to the Indian territory, put forward for the first time, it was contradicting their earlier official positions.

On September 8, 1959, in a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai treated Wu-Je, Sangchamalla and Lapthal as three separate areas.

A year later, however, the Chinese side included these areas of at least 300 square miles which belonged to India into the Tibetan territory.

This is just an example.

In this context, it is interesting to study the historical background of the 'disputed' area, called Barahoti by India and Wu-Je by China.

The Beginning of the Story

In June 1890, the Foreign Department in Delhi received a report from the Commissioner of Kumaon, reporting the visit to Bampa of the Agent of the *Jaghphoon* (Dzongpon) of Dapha (Daba) in Tibet. The subject of the letter was "Tibetan encroachments on the Garhwal frontier."

The Under-Secretary in a Foreign Department asked for a map of area: "in the 1879 map shows to be within the border, although the borderline is not coloured. And we have an older map still, I recollect, where it is marked within the Kumaon border. We should first obtain the 1884 sheet however."

A few days later, the Department got the proper map: "I have now got the 1884 sheet and several other maps from the Intelligence Branch. Bara Hoti is within the British frontier, but last year the Tibetans were in possession much lower down, on our side, than Bara Hoti. They prevented the Assistant Commissioner passing within two days' march of Hoti - a proceeding the Commissioner of Kumaon thought perfectly reasonable and harmless."

A discussion then took place in the Government, it was concluded that one Colonel Erskine was wrong to say that the map of 1884 brought "a large slice of country including Bara Hoti within the British boundary, all the territory shown as British in 1884 was also shown as British in 1850, and it was never shown as anything else on the map of 1879 is only the colouring of the boundary was omitted - probably by some mistake of the draftsman."

The British decided to act.

A Report about the Encroachment

The telegram had come from a 'native' news reporter which had written that "a Tibetan official has come down to Bampa (which is 20 miles or more below [south of] Hoti, but does not say what following he has. He [the Tibetan official] claims Hoti as Tibetan territory, and the place will, no doubt, be occupied again by the Tibetans this summer. But a further report has been sent for, and DO [Demi-Official] orders need be passed on the present

correspondence. Hundes is the Tibetan district immediately across the frontier; and by 'Hunias' the people of Hundes is meant."

The Tibetan name of the district is Tsada (or Zanda).

Establishing a Picket in Barahoti

On July 18, 1890, the Chief Secretary to the Government of The North-Western Provinces and Oudh, submitted a report about "the re-establishment of a Tibetan picket at Bara Hoti".

The Deputy Secretary in Delhi noted: "It will be remembered that last year and the year before a considerable number of Tibetans came into the Niti District, set up a custom house at Bara Hoti, turned back the Assistant Commissioner while on tour, and otherwise virtually took possession of the country down to near Malari. They came in both times, in spring and returned for the winter, to their own side of the range. It was recommended that a party of about 20 Gurkhas should go up in September and turn them out."

The official further mentioned that in fact a large expedition of 200 sepoy had been sent by the military authorities, but so much delay occurred that "the force did start from Sobha till the 8th November and did not reach Bara Hoti till nearly the end of the month, by which time the Tibetans had retired for the winter."

The issue continued to be discussed: "It is now reported that a very few unarmed Tibetans have returned to Bara Hoti and it is a question whether it is worthwhile to take any notice of them. If anything is done at all it should be as an ordinary matter of police duty - a small party of police being sent to drive them out. But if so, it should be done while they are still there and the winter should not be waited for. On the other hand, it may be considered that last year's expedition [with the 200 sepoy] may be considered as practical evidence that the country belongs to India, and that our claim has

been practically made good. In this case there might be no necessity to take any action until the Tibetans make themselves obnoxious again at, or about, Bara Hoti. The only political significance about the affair is its resemblance to the Sikkim question." The British were then facing problems with the Tibetans in North Sikkim crossing over the ridge line and sending their yaks to graze in British territory.

The Ministry of External Affairs' conclusion was: "The Tibetans come in and assert a claim to territory, and behind them come the Chinese and support this claim on their own account-no matter how preposterous it is - and a troublesome international question arises. The way to obviate the greater difficulty is obviously, to nip the smaller one in the bud."

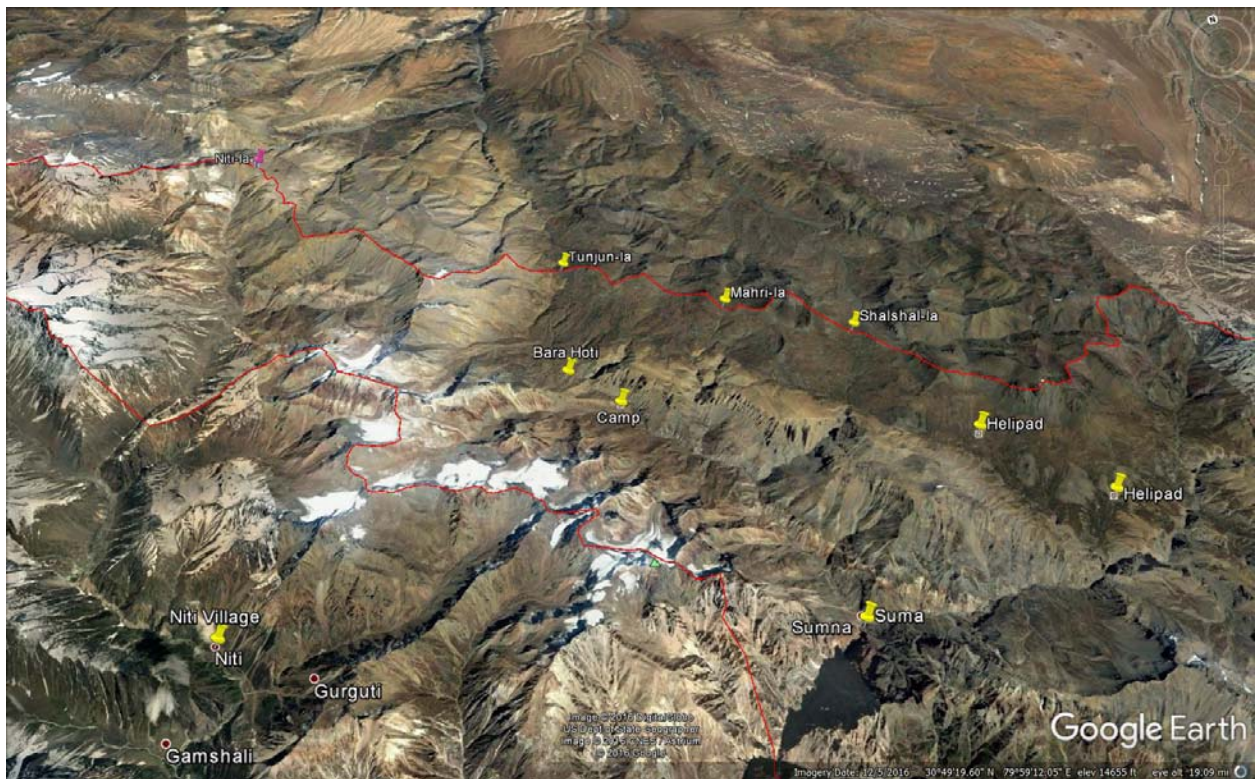
The Chinese threat will materialize in 1954. We shall come to it, though the Chinese were nowhere in the picture at this time.

On July 17, 1890, the Secretary of the Ministry replied to the note:

"Although only a few men have come to Hoti and are unarmed, it is evident they have come as officers of their Government with the intention of exercising authority, for they have been summoning the-people and taking bonds from them. I should think we might tell the Government of the North-Western Provinces that they should not allow these Tibetans to exercise authority in Hoti, and that they should take such steps as they think necessary to prevent them and to make it perfectly clear that Bara Hoti is British territory. Probably this could be best effected by sending one of the Civil Officers of Kumaon on tour to Bara Hoti."

Two days later, another note provided more information: "Tibetans came to Hoti and invited our people to go to a mart in Tibet to trade. They asked them to undertake not to introduce diseased goats and not to invade Tibet, and they asked for the letter which the Commissioner of Kumaon had last year sent to one Natbu Padhan, then they went away."

Delhi's conclusions were: "Now if this is so, it appears to me that the Tibetans have by their actions acknowledged Hoti to be within our border and made no attempt to exercise authority there. But the report is by no means lucidly written, and if the North-Western Provinces can send of an officer... it will be well, for it would save two purposes to make clear our assertion of authority at Hoti, and to obtain real information." But let us have a look at the original report.



The Letter from the Local Sarpanch

The letter 'not lucidly written' had been translated into English; it had come from Durga Dutta, Patwari, Mana Painkhanda and was dated July 1, 1890. Dutta wrote: "On making an enquiry (I find) that the Dupa officers' servants, one *Sarji* [messenger of the Tibetan Commissioner or *Dzongpon*] of Urgyal by name, with two men with him, brought on the 19th May of the current year, salt on 50 goats and gave it to their *mitrae* or customers of villages Gamsali, Bampa and Farkya. After two or three days, they went away with

rice on the goats, and a copy in their Tibetan language of the *khat* which the Commissioner had given to Nathu Padhan from Ramri. Again, the same *Sarji* returned with two men on 10th June, called together to Gamsali all Padhans from above Soonagiri and Jelam to Niti and told them that the Dupa [Daba?] officer was gone on a pilgrimage to Kailas, and that the Padhans should give in their usual bonds about '*Ragbyadh*' (meaning that they should not bring diseased goats, etc.) as also (a bond) of bringing '*Pal tan*' (meaning that they should not bring a British force). All Padhans gave bonds about '*Ragbyadb*', but with regard to '*Paltan*' they replied that it was not in their power whether a force did or did not come and they could not give a bond about it."

The letter continued: "The *Sarjis* went away. Again, for the third time, the same three persons on three yaks (Chanur Gao) returned on 27th June via Char Hoti and said that Jagponam the Dapa officers had returned from pilgrimage and three guards had come with them and stationed themselves as usual at Hoti, and that the Dapa officers had sent a word to the natives of the 'Ghata that they should fear nothing from (the Tibetans) but come for trade as usual and bring the original *khat*. A letter also came for Johar Singh Bampa (complaining) that he had not come (to Thibet) for two years, that the man who had quarreled with him had been summoned and the quarrel would be settled. But Johar Singh won't go. Having said this and given the letter, they went away. It is said that on 24th, 26th and 27th June, Fonya, Nathu Padhans and other natives of this Ghata went to Hundes."

The letter concluded: "Sir, all natives of this Ghata went to Hundes yesterday, and to-day via Raj Hoti and Char Hoti for trade. Some five who had remained are ready to start on the 3rd instant. They (the *Sarjis*) did not come armed. The purpose for which they came has been given in detail (in this report). It is also known that the same *Sarjis* used to come two or three times every year formerly also."

The Final Conclusion

On July 31, 1890, the Officiating Deputy Secretary in Foreign Department wrote to the Chief Secretary of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh: "It appears from the report submitted by Durga Dutta, Patwari, that some Tibetans recently came to Bara Hoti unarmed, and invited the people to a mart in Tibet for purposes of trade, and that the head of the party also asked for the letter which the Commissioner of Kumaon had last year sent to one Nathu, Padhan. The Tibetans appear to have made no attempt on this occasion to exercise any authority on this part of the frontier, and are reported to have since returned to Hundes [Tibet]."

The final conclusion was: "If the circumstances have been correctly reported by Durga Dutta, the action of the Tibetans may be considered to operate as an admission that Hoti is within the British border. The reports received on the subject are however not very clear and I am to suggest that, if His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor sees no objection, an officer may be deputed to Bara Hoti to enquire into the exact circumstances of the case, and that a further report may be submitted for the information of the Government of India. This visit will, it is hoped, have the effect also of making clear the assertion of British authority at Bara Hoti."

It was to remain at that for the next fifty years.

It is only in the early 1950s, that the Tibetans tried to revive the issue, this time probably under the instigation of the Chinese.

The Historical Note from the Intelligence Bureau

In July 1952, in a note 'Border Disputes and Collection of Taxes by Tibetans in Garhwal District'¹ the Intelligence Bureau described the topography of the

¹ Note addressed by Waryam Singh of IB to Pillai of the Ministry of External Affairs. Note sent through the Ministry of Affairs (D.I.B. No. 24/76/52(4) dated July 21, 1952).

Himalaya in this area of today's Uttarakhand²: "The Garhwal-Tibet border can only be crossed through the Mana and Niti Valleys where there are open places and habitation, while the rest of the border area consists of snow-covered mountains studded with glaciers. In the Mana Valley, the last village on the Indian side is Mana which is situated at 26 miles from Mana Pass, which lies on the boundary of Tibet and India. From Mana the route to Tibet following along Saraswati river and there are no grazing grounds or other places of habitation on the way which could be occupied or claimed by the people of Tibet. There is no border dispute in this Valley, although some rumours have been heard, that the Tibetans claim territory upto Kanchanganga, which is situated about one mile south of Badri Nath. There are no grounds for attaching any importance to such rumours."

This refers probably to the Nilang-Jadhang dispute. There were definitively old Tibetan claims in areas south of Tsangchok-la pass.

The IB Report continues its descriptions of the area: "There are four passes between Niti Valley and Tibet, namely - Gothing Pass [Niti], Damjin [Tun Jun] Pass, Hoti Pass and Ghirti Pass. Niti, the northern most village in the Indian territory, is situated at 11 miles from Gothing Pass and Damjin Pass. There are few plains situated near these passes in the Indian territory."

The Intelligence admits that it appears that there is an old boundary dispute about Hoti Plain, which in fact consists of two plains called Bara Hoti and Chhota Hoti, both situated near the Chor Hoti Pass.

This refer to the incident mentioned above.

The history background of the 'dispute' is then explained: "About the end of last century the Tibetans had established a Customs Post at Hoti Plain. To stop this practice, the British Govt. [Government] had to send out a detachment of Gurkhas along with Shri Dharma Nand Joshi, Deputy Collector, in 1890. This had a salutary effect and the Tibetans removed their

² Which belonged today's Uttarakhand

post. It appears that for some time past the Tibetans have again been establishing a Police-cum-Customs post at Hoti during the trading season." The access of the place is difficult, but from there, a tab can be kept on the area. It has also to be noted that the access is much easier from the Tibetan side than from the Indian. Over the years, this will make it easier for the Chinese to intrude.

The Intelligence Bureau continues: "It is quite possible that if the Tibetans are not stopped from establishing their post at Hoti Plain, they might eventually claim it to be their own territory. Since there is no habitation or cultivation in this area, the Garhwal authorities hardly ever visit the area or take any action to denote that it lies within their jurisdiction."

Along the Himalaya watershed, there were quite a few areas where Tibetans authorities tried to change the border for the sake of their traders and shepherds. The IB report further remarked: "It may be mentioned that last year [1951] when some Indian traders established their trade at Hoti Plain for buying wool etc. from the Tibetans living near the border, the Dzung-Pon [District Commissioner] of Dhapa (Tibet) [Daba in Western Tibet] sent his Serjis³ (*Sarji* or 'messengers') to Hoti Plain to serve notices on the Indian traders to appear before him."

The IB recommended to the Government of India: "It is, therefore, essential that the Govt. of India should make it clear to the Govt. of Tibet and its Dzungpon that the Hoti Plain is Indian territory and the Tibetans have no right to establish any Customs post there; nor can they exercise any authority in the area."

The report added: "We understand that the Deputy Commissioner Garhwal has already suggested to the U.P. Govt.⁴ that he and the Supdt. [Superintendent] of Police should visit Hoti with a detachment of Garhwal

³ Or *Sarjis*.

⁴ Tehri and Garwal was then under the Government of the United Province.

Rifles and Armed Police, and that they should hoist the Indian flag there in order to establish their own authority and stop the Tibetans from establishing their Customs post."

It is what the ITBP still do every year, though now they often Chinese troops patrolling the high-altitude plain.

The Intelligence Bureau concluded: "A number of Indian traders from Niti and Mana Valleys visit Tibet every year for purposes of trade. They have to pay certain taxes inside Tibet. However, in case of Mana Valley, the *Serjis* of the *Dzong-Pon* [Dzongpon] of Chaprong [Tsaparang] realize Rs.22/- from the people of Mana as *Singthal* i.e. Land Tax. This collection is made in Indian territory when the *Serji* comes to announce that the Pass is open. The *Serjis* are also provided with free food and fuel. It is reported that in the records of the *Dzong-Pon* this levy is entered as Land Tax and not as Trade Tax. No such collection is made from the villagers of Niti Valley. We feel that the Tibetan tax-collectors should not be allowed to collect taxes inside the Indian territory. The traders could pay this amount which is really a Trade Tax, when they visit the Tibetan markets."

A similar situation had arisen in Nilang/Jadhang area.

On April 24, 1952, the ministry had received the opinion of Ministry of Defence (MOD): "the guiding principle in the new circumstances must be the Government of India's ability to vindicate what they would regard as the appropriate frontier, since it would be idle to claim territory which could not be effectively protected or controlled."

Speaking about Nilang area, the MOD continued: "The area under dispute is an extremely difficult country physically and climatically with hardly any communications. It therefore follows that operations in the area will have to be confined to short periods and undertaken by specially trained infantry organized on an ad hoc basis with very scanty artillery support and no support whatsoever from either tanks or aircraft. The administrative

problems connected with an operation would be considerable. Even if the defence area were narrowed down to the protection of the villages Nilang and Jadhong, with the present resources of the army, it would be well nigh impossible to guarantee the integrity of the above villages. It will be equally difficult to afford hundred per cent protection to the small inhabited localities lying with the Indian frontier within the Indian frontier in this area."

Therefore, the MOD conclusion was "Whatever solution the E.A [External Affairs] Ministry adopt, it would be subject to the conditions set out above so far as the defence of the frontier will be concerned."

Like for the case of Nilang/Jadhong, in Barahoti, it was decided to assert Indian customary rights in the area. Not doing so, could have had serious consequences for the entire Himalayan frontier.

The View from the Ministry of External Affairs

A few months later, in September 1952, an official of the Ministry of External Affairs pointed out: "Last year there was some trouble over the opening of market for trading with Western Tibet at Hoti instead of the established market known as Nabra in Tibet. The local Tibetan officials who used to collect certain dues from our traders suffered a loss and resented the functioning of the Hoti market. There is, however, no indication that the Tibetans wanted to establish a customs post at Hoti."

The issue was referred to G. Mukharji, the Home Secretary of the Uttar Pradesh Government who, on December 27, 1952, wrote back to the Foreign Secretary. Note that the subject line of the letter read: "Border disputes and collection of taxes by Tibetans in Garhwal district."

Lucknow acknowledged the receipt of the Intelligence Bureau's note mentioned above and affirmed that the State Government had been keeping the Government of India in the loop as far as the developments along the Indo-Tibetan border were concerned.

The Home Secretary further asserted that there was no case of “encroachment has so far been reported though at one or two places tax collectors from Tibet did come in but were persuaded to go back.”

He added that “it is rather embarrassing that tax collectors should come in at all and it is, therefore, requested that the matter may be settled finally with the Tibetan Government do not come in to India for purposes of tax collection.”

Mukharji concluded: “Until this is done, it is feared that similar visits will be paid in future also creating unnecessary embarrassment for Government as well as for our people on the border.”

He also answered the question about the practicability of the State Government stationing a small force of armed police on the border. Quoting from an earlier communication⁵, he reiterated that “it would not be possible to stop any intruders from coming into our territory with the help of small police guards alone.”

He further pointed out that it would be difficult for the State Government to make adequate police arrangements in such remote areas “on account of difficulties of climate and terrain.”

He mentioned the creation of a Border Security Force which is “at present under examination with the Government of India” and stated “a force of that kind alone can be trained and equipped to function in those remote and difficult areas. Until that force is properly established, the State Government find it difficult to meet the situation by posting armed police in those areas.”

It is only on October 24, 1962, four days after the Chinese massive attack that the Indo-Tibetan Border Police was raised on.⁶ But this did not stop the Chinese from trespassing every year since then.

⁵ Dated December 29, 1951.

⁶ ITBP is a multi-dimensional force. Presently Battalions of ITBP are deployed on Border Guarding Duties from Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Jachep La in Arunachal Pradesh covering 3488 KM of India China Border are manning Border Out Posts at an altitude ranging from

The Panchsheel Negotiations

In December 1953, the talks for an agreement on trade and pilgrimage started in Beijing. It resulted in the infamous Panchsheel Agreement.

Looking at the way Indian diplomats were ready to bend backward to any Chinese demands, Mao Zedong and his colleagues would find more and more outstanding issues to rise. But in May-June 1954, they were still awaiting the outcome of the Geneva Conference on Indo-China.

The Indian diplomats thought that by naming six passes for the traders and pilgrims, they had delineated a border.⁷

India tried to include other passes: "Traders and pilgrims from India and Western Tibet may travel by the routes traversing the following localities and passes," but it was not accepted by China.

The passes/routes mentioned by Delhi were: Tashigong, Gartok; Spanggur Tso To Rudok; Chiakang, Churkang, Ruksom; Tashigong, Churkang, Ruksom; Rudok, Ruksom, Rawang; Bodpo La; Shipki La; Keobarang; Shimdang; Gumrang (Khimokul); Tsang Chok La; Muling La; Mana Pass; Niti Pass; Tunjun-la; Marhi La; Shalshal Pass; Kungri Bingri Pass; Darma Pass; Lampiya Dhura (Lampiya Lekh); Mangshadhura and Lipu Lekh.

But Delhi capitulated, China was then a friend and ultimately only 6 passes were named.

9000 ft to 18500 ft in the Western, Middle & Eastern Sector of India China Border. ITBP is basically a mountain trained Force and most of the officers and men are professionally trained mountaineers and skiers.

⁷ The six passes were (1) Shipki La pass, (2) Mana pass, (3) Niti pass, (4) Kungri Bingri pass, (5) Darma pass, and (6) Lipu Lekh pass.

Further they added "the customary route leading to Tashigong along the valley of the Shangatsangpu (Senge Tsangpo or Indus) River may continue to be traversed in accordance with custom." Beijing refused to mention with the other passes and routes; they would soon claim Demchok as part of their territory.



The fact that India did not insist on this list, turned into a tragedy; as a result China will soon claim the area south of Tunjun-la (and Tsang Chok-la as well). The Indian negotiators had clearly not done their homework.

In a short note on the 'talks' for the Panchsheel Agreement written after the signature, the Foreign Secretary noted: "It would also be desirable for us to establish check-posts at all disputed points as soon as possible so that there may be no opportunity for Chinese to take possession of such areas and face us with a *fait accompli*."

In this connection the opening remarks of Premier Zhou Enlai that "there are bound to be some problems between two great countries like India and China with a long common border... but we are prepared to settle all such problems as are ripe for settlement now" are significant.

The note said: "We immediately countered this by saying that we had mentioned all outstanding questions in this region, and stressed this several times later the Chinese did not pursue the matter further. It is, however,

likely that the Chinese may raise or create border problems if we are slow in advancing our administration right up to our frontiers, especially in the disputed areas which are fortunately not many. This is also a matter which requires further examination and consultations between the Ministries of external Affairs, Home Affairs and Defence."

The former Indo-Tibet border (now Sino-Indian) was forgotten in the process.

The ink was hardly dry

It took only two months for India to discover that all problems had not been solved. The first Chinese incursion in the Barahoti area of Uttar Pradesh occurred in June 1954. This was the first of a series of incursions numbering in the hundreds which culminated in the attack of October 1962 ...and which continues till date.

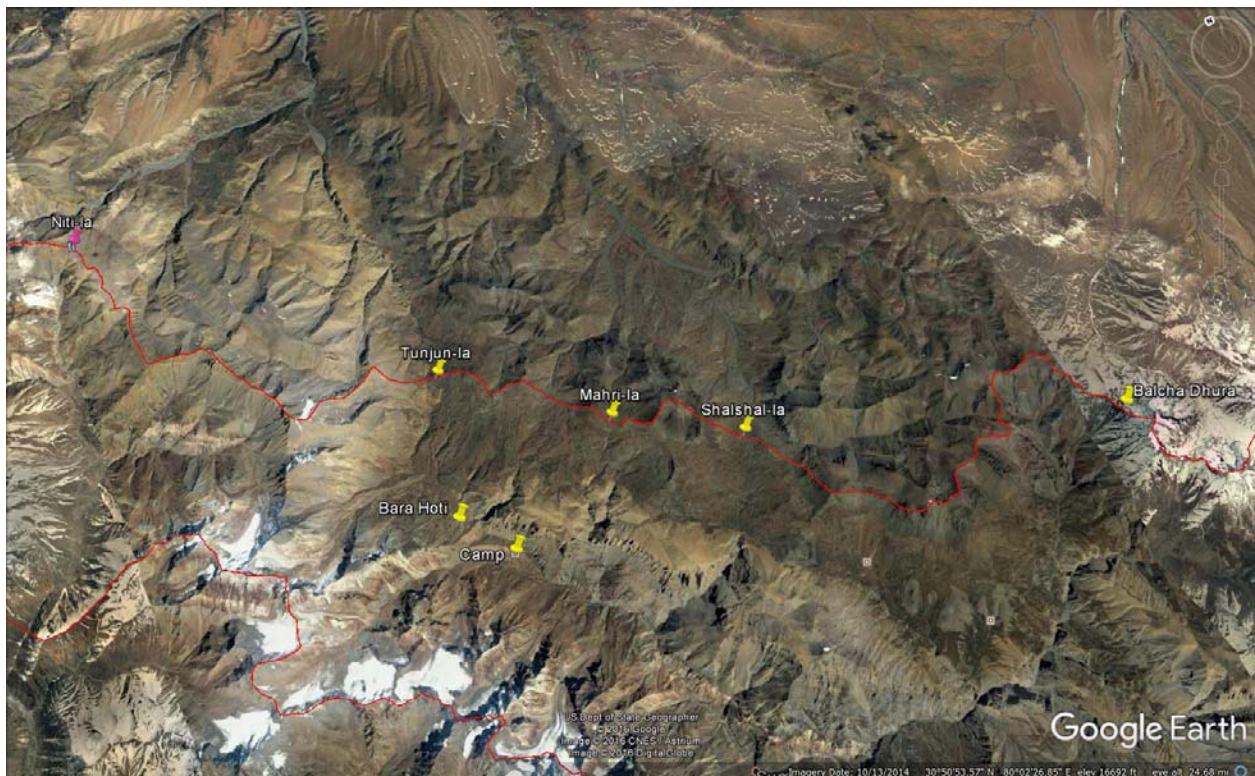
The ink was hardly dried on the famous Panchsheel Agreement, when the Chinese entered Barahoti; a first note was given by the counsellor of China in India to the Ministry of External Affairs dated July 17, 1954.

The irony of the story is that it is China which complained about the incursion of Indian troops... on India's territory!

Though Barahoti was well inside Indian territory, the exchange of notes continued during the following months and years. This exchange is the first of more than one thousand *Memoranda, Notes and Letters* exchanged by the Governments of India and China over the next ten years, published in the *White Papers* on China.

TN Kaul who had negotiated the Agreement philosophically explained later: "Territorial disputes have existed between near and distant neighbours through the ages. The question is whether they can and should be resolved by war, threat, use of force or through the more civilized and peaceful

method of negotiation... Both sides still profess their faith in the Five Principles, and therein lies perhaps some hope for the future.⁸ The Five Principles had put Kaul and his colleagues to sleep. Some officials soon realized the blunder. John Lall, who later served as Diwan in Sikkim, commented: "Ten days short of three months after the Tibet Agreement was signed the Chinese sent the first signal that friendly co-existence was over... Significantly, Niti was one of the six passes specified in the Indo-Chinese Agreement by which traders and pilgrims were permitted to travel."⁹ Friendly co-existence had perhaps never existed.



The 'dispute' starts

On July 17, 1954, a note handed over by the Chinese Counsellor in Delhi to South Block briefly mentioned for the first time the issue. The Chinese asserted that "over thirty Indian troops armed with rifles crossed the Niti

⁸ Kaul, op. cit., p. 104.

⁹ Lall, op. cit., p. 240.

pass on 29 June 1954, and intruded into Wu-Je [Barahoti] of the Ali [Ngari] Area of the Tibet Region of China. (Wu-Je is about one day's journey from the Niti Pass). The above happening is not in conformity with the principles of non-aggression and friendly co-existence between China and India, and the spirit of the Joint Communiqué issued recently by the Prime Ministers of China and India."

How Barahoti, a pass between Tibet and India, suddenly got a Chinese name is still today a mystery.

The note continued: "It is hoped that the Government of India would promptly investigate the matter, and order the immediate withdrawal of the Indian troops."

Probably adepts of Sun Tzu or the *Art of War*, the Chinese had decided to attack to justify their un-defendable position.

On 13 August 1954, the Chinese Counsellor in Delhi delivered another note to South Block, providing more detail on the so-called Indian intrusion:

"further investigations reveals that they were a unit of 33 persons attached to the local garrison in U.P., India. The unit was under the command of an officer called Nathauja [according to Chinese pronunciation] who was a deputy commander of the troops stationing at Kanman [Chinese pronunciation]. Together with the officer, there was a local official named Sopit Singh [Chinese pronunciation] of Chinal tribe in U.P., who was also a district magistrate of Walzanjapur [Chinese pronunciation] district. Besides, there were a doctor, radio-operators and soldiers. They were putting up in 17 tents." This was not in conformity with the Five Principles, the Chinese diplomat added.

Finally, on August 27, 1954, India woke up of its stupor: "We have made thorough enquiries regarding the allegation ... our further investigations have confirmed that the allegation is entirely incorrect. A party of our Border

Security Force is encamped in the Hoti Plain which is south-east of Niti pass and is in Indian territory."

The most ironic part of the story was that the Chinese were confused about the exact location of Wu-Je. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) stated: "none of our troops or personnel have crossed north of the Niti pass, as verbally mentioned by the Chinese Counsellor."

The Indian notes also pointed that some "Tibetan officials tried to cross into our territory in Hoti plain without proper documents, which is not in conformity with the Agreement." The ministry could only hope that Beijing will instruct the Tibetans "not to cross into Indian territory as we have instructed our authorities not to cross into Tibetan territory."

The correspondence was to continue for months and years in the same vein. It will soon become a regular yearly feature.

A year later, on June 28, 1955, the MEA wrote: "Tibetan officials attempted to enter in our territory in the Hoti plain. We have now received a report that a party of Chinese are camping at Hoti with 5 tents and 20 horses and that they have entered our territory without proper documents."

The note further requested that "instructions be issued immediately to these personnel to withdraw across the border over the Tunjun-la and to refrain from entering Indian territory unless they are in possession of proper documents."

Again it was repeated that it was not in conformity with the principles of non-aggression and friendly co-existence enounced in the 1954 Agreement. An Indian official, SK Roy, Special Officer Frontier Area¹⁰, met a Chinese official in Delhi on June 28, 1955 in connection of the Chinese intrusions, the Chinese informed the MEA that their Government "has times and again instructed the personnel of the frontier garrison not to move a single step beyond the Chinese border. Our investigations have confirmed that in the

¹⁰ or SOFA

course of the last year and the current one there never has been any case of Chinese personnel crossing the border in the vicinity of the Niti Pass.”

This shows that the India-Tibet border has become the India-China border.

On July 11, 1955, the Chinese handed over¹¹ a reply to Shri T.N. Kaul:

“Another batch of more than 30 Indians soldiers crossed into Wu-Je of the Tibet Region of China on 25 June 1955 and engaged in constructing fortifications at places very close to our garrison forces stationing there.”

A week later, India replied to Chinese note saying it was not representing the factual position: “The troops mentioned were not in the Tibet region of China but at the Bara Hoti, on the Hoti plain in India which is south of the Tunjun-la.”

It also pointed out that the Indian troops withdrew in September 1954, because the outpost is a seasonal post; the MEA had some doubt if Barahoti were the same place; it admitted: “We are not aware of the exact location of Wu-Je, though the Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy mentioned that it was 12 kilometers north of the Tunjun-la, but we are quite confident that our troops have not, under any circumstances, crossed the border into Tibet Region of China.”

Another note was given to the Chinese embassy in Delhi on August 18, 1955. It had received a report that the *Sarji*, a Tibetan official, who had come with the Chinese troops in the Hoti plain had tried to “realise grazing tax from Indian herdsman grazing goats in the area. This is a new development which we would request the Chinese authorities to stop forthwith.”

The exchanged continued during the following months.

¹¹ To TN Kaul, a Joint Secretary who had negotiated the Panchsheel Agreement with the Chinese a year earlier.

On September 26, 1955, the Chinese embassy in Delhi mentioned¹² the informal note given by SK Roy on August 18: "Our repeated investigations made in Wu-Je area of the Tibet Region have proved that no Chinese personnel has ever crossed the border. On the contrary, it was the Indian troops that intruded into Wu-Je which has always belonged to Dabasting [Daba Dzong?] of the Tibet Region within the Chinese boundary."

The note added: "the Indian troops are still stationing at Wu-Je, and are incessantly carrying out reconnaissance activities on the Chinese Garrison. Hence the situation is rather serious."

The Chinese conclusion was that "since no Chinese personnel has crossed the border, there could not have been such situation as stated in your informal note."

On November 5, South Block gave another note to the Chinese stating that there was clearly a misunderstanding on the location of Wu-Je: "We are quite definite that our personnel have at no time intruded into the Wu-Je area of the Tibet region of China but have throughout remained at Bara Hoti which is 2 miles south of the Tunjun-la."

It was emphasized that Chinese troops had come south of the Tunjun-la and camped at Bara Hoti alongside the Indian troops: "We would like to repeat that we are most anxious to avoid any possible incident and we, therefore, suggest that strict instructions should be issued that no personnel from the Tibet region of China should cross into India without due permission."

It repeats once more that the India troops "have not entered the Wu-Je area because they have never crossed the Tunjun-la, the border pass ...and Wu-Je was stated by Mr. Kang to be 12 kilometres north of this pass."

On the same day, it is also pointed to the Chinese that as the Indian detachment was approaching Damzan, which is 10 miles south of the Niti

¹² The note was given by Kang, the Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy to TN Kaul

Pass (and therefore clearly in Indian territory), they were stopped by 20 Chinese soldier.

The Chinese troops sent a message to the Indians they could not go via Damzan without the permission from the Chinese authorities at Gartok. The Indian troops insisted on going via Damzan as it was clearly Indian territory: "if the Chinese party used force to stop [them], they would be responsible for the consequences."

Finally, Delhi asserted that "great restraint [had been] exercised by our detachment. The Chinese soldiers did not try to stop our detachment but wanted to remain on the Indian territory at Damzan without due and proper permission." The Indian note then gives the coordinates of Damzan, south of the Niti Pass, one of the passes named in the Panchsheel Agreement.

The Tax System between Tibet and India

In the meantime, members of Parliaments started shooting questions. On December 2, 1954, the government was asked if the number of traders had gone down during the current year. The answer was: "No, the number of Tibetan traders who bring wool and salt to Niti *Ghati* was about the same as during past two years." The government clarifies further: "Owing to pushing back of *Sarji* post from Hoti, there had been some nervousness amongst Tibetan traders in the beginning, but later they visited Niti *Ghati* as usual. This [Indian] Agency [in Gartok] does not keep any date of these traders, but Bampa Police Check post records them."

The Parliament was also told that no fresh passport system had been introduced after the signature of the Agreement, though the Tibetans were now required to declare the number of their animals to the local official before going down to India: "This is required for the purposes of official dues payable by them."

The Indian Trade Agent in Gartok, Lakshman Singh Jangpangi explained to the ministry that according to an old customary tax the Tibetans going down

to Niti *Ghati* pay one Tranka (equal to 9/6) per trader and Rs.6/- per hundred sheep taken with them to *Dzongpon* of Daba district. One half of latter (i.e. 6/-) is paid by the Indian trader.

The Tibetans going down via other *Ghaties* had also to pay some dues to the Tibetan officer there, though it varies from place to place. The customary dues were recovered from both the Indian and Tibetan traders engaged in this border trade. These dues were, however, not uniform and vary from one district to other and were paid both in cash and kind.

Jangpangi noted: "As these taxes are old, so question of difficulty in getting permission in this respect does not arise. These taxes being a private income to the *Dzongpon*, he does not place any obstacle in their way."

The Indian officer added: "So far no passport system for these traders coming down to India, they have in all cases to declare the number of their animals for purposes of realization of taxes. It is for this purpose the Tibetans have to report to the border district official before going down to India. The Government have no proposal to approach the Chinese Government in this regard.

The note gave more details on the traditional dealings on the border: "The Tibet traders visit the adjoining villages in the districts of Almora, Garhwal, Tehri Garhwal in U.P., Mahasu in H.P. and Lahaul in the Punjab for barter trade of wool and salt with grain and *gur*. Their visit to these places depends on availability of grain there."

Importantly for the 'dispute', it clarified the role of the Sarji, a servant of *Dzongpon*¹³. It was based on the visit of the Sarji that once the Tibetans claimed Barahoti. Jangpangi said: [the *Sarji*] visits Indian villages first in order to ascertain whether there are any diseases amongst men or cattle. The routes are then declared opened after his report to the *Dzongpon*."

¹³ Tibetan District Commissioners.

The Office of the ITA in Gartok did kept track of the number and detail of Tibetan traders who come down to Niti *Ghati*.

The confusion about Wu-Je continued.

The following year, the situation continued unchanged.

On June 7, 1956, the Ministry of External Affairs told the Chinese Charge d’Affaires in Delhi: “We have throughout maintained that Chinese personnel have crossed the Tunjun-la from the Tibet region of China and entered the territory of the Indian Union, whereas the Chinese Embassy have maintained that our personnel have entered the Wu-Je area of the Tibet region of China.”

India’s rightly contended that Bara Hoti is two miles south of the Tunjun-la whereas Chinese Embassy have held that Wu-Je is 12 kms north of this pass.

The next day, the Chinese embassy answered: “Now that the Wu-Je area has already become passable, if the Government of China and India should again send their respective troops into that area as they did in 1955, a situation similar to that of 1955 will inevitably recur, in which the troops of the two countries confront each other. The Chinese Government cannot but be concerned about this, and it is presumed that the Indian Government shares the same feeling.”

Not answering directly about the location of Tunjun-la, the embassy said the data available with them “proved that the Wu-Je area has always been under the jurisdiction of Daba Dzong of the Tibet Region of China. This area is within Chinese territory.”

They further asserted that according to “historical records of this part of the Tibet Region of China adjacent to Indian territory, Tunjun-la is proven to be within Chinese territory. There is no historical record showing Tunjun-la to be a border pass between China and India.”

It is interesting to point out that each and every area which had been once claim by the Tibetans were not part of the Chinese territory.

Beijing was however keen on a joint investigation by representatives of the Chinese and Indian Government. China said that it would be useful: "The Chinese Government is willing to continue consultations with the Indian Government with regard to the method in such a joint investigation.

The Chinese Government wishes further to suggest that, pending the settlement of the Wu-Je question by the two Governments through normal diplomatic channels, both Governments should refrain from sending troops into the Wu-Je area so as to avoid a situation in which the troops of the two countries confront each other, and to maintain the normal state of affairs along the Sino-Indian border."

On June 8, 1956, Chen Chia-kang, then Assistant Foreign Minister of China, handed over to Bahadur Singh, Counsellor of the Indian Embassy in China, a memorandum officially stating that the Chinese Government was willing to undertake a joint investigation with the Indian Government to settle the question of Wu-Je (Hoti) in the meantime both Governments should refrain from sending troops into the Wu-Je area till the issue is solved.

Apparently a week later, R.K. Nehru, the Indian Ambassador to China told Chi Peng-fei, Vice-Foreign Minister of China, that Delhi had agreed to a joint investigation.

According to the Chinese note, RK Nehru was of the opinion that the joint investigation should be based on the contents of an informal talk in 1955 between Kang Mao- Chao, former Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in India, and TN Kaul, the Joint Secretary in the MEA.

Kang and Kaul would have agreed that Tunjun-la was the border pass between China and India, and that therefore the aim of the joint investigation should be limited to finding out on the spot whether Wu-Je or Bara Hoti was to the north or to the south of Tunjun-la.

But the Chinese continued to insist that "Tunjun-la is proven to be within Chinese territory there is no historical record showing Tunjun-la to be a border pass between China and India."

The correspondence/discussions carried on.

On October 3, 1956, an Indian note pointed out: "there seemed to have been agreement between the Governments of India and China in regard to the location of the Indo-Tibetan border in this area at this Tunjun-La Pass."

It is on this basis that India agreed to a joint survey. The ministry in Delhi then remarked that it was "observed with surprise the appearance of what seems to be a change in the Chinese view of the position of this pass in relation to the border." To clarify further the Indian position clear, the note made the following points:

a - The district of Garhwal, in which Barahoti is situated, is, and has always been, a part of India;

b -The historical evidence to support this goes back for many centuries;

c- By possession and usage also Barahoti is, and has always been, part of India and Tunjun-la is, and has always been, the border Pas;

d -The precise latitude/longitude of this Pass is 30° 53' latitude north, 79° 59' longitude east.

This may assist identification of the Pass, and avoid danger of confusion with any other Pass.

Delhi felt that a "proper understanding of the actual situation is a basic preliminary to any joint investigation."

But the 'misunderstanding' was not forthcoming.

A note from the Foreign Secretary

On February 24, 1958, Subimal Dutt, the Foreign Secretary informed the Prime Minister that according to reports received in recent months, the

Chinese were very active on the Sino-Indian frontier: "This might explain the delay in the Chinese Government agreeing to discuss the Hoti dispute with us," noted Dutt.

The problem, as we shall see, was that the Chinese did know where Barahoti was; they also wanted to reinforce their occupation in Western Tibet; Dutt wrote: "However we have now told them that we are prepared to discuss matters relating to this dispute without making it a pre-condition that if the disputed area is south of the Tunjun-la Pass it will automatically be regarded as part of Indian territory. If, we hope, these discussions take place without further delay, we may have an inkling into the Chinese mind in regard to frontier questions in general."

It was clear that the 'talks' which occurred in April 1958 were to be a sounding board for the entire border, particularly the Aksai Chin, as Delhi had just discovered that a road had been built in the area (without the knowledge of the Government).

On February 2, 1958, Dutt had forwarded some notes of BK Acharya¹⁴ as well as a letter dated December 20, 1957, from the Indian Embassy in Beijing. The Ministry's Historical Division had also prepared a note on Barahoti. Dutt told Nehru: "It is true that in the past we insisted on the tacit acceptance by the Chinese of Tunjun-la as the border pass and suggested that the question whether Bara Hoti was part of Indian territory or Chinese territory should be determined with reference to its situation south or north of the pass."

The Foreign Secretary then suggested: "I feel however that we need not press our view to the point of breaking up further discussions with the Chinese Government. We need not ultimately concede their point of view. It is important however to know at least in one particular dispute how the Chinese mind is working in regard to the general question of Indo-Chinese

¹⁴ The Director of the Eastern Division in the Ministry,

border in this area. We may therefore agree to joint discussions on the lines desired by the Chinese Government in paragraph 3 of the note enclosed with Shri Bahadur Singh's¹⁵ letter of December 20."

Subimal Dutt's conclusions were: "We must use the information contained in this paragraph [of BK Acharya's report] to rebut any possible Chinese contention that if Tunjun-la were in fact the border pass it would have been specifically mentioned in the Sino-Indian agreement on Tibet."

This was the crux of the matter, the Chinese were exploiting an error during the negotiations: why did India did not insist to have Tunjun-la in the list of passes.

The only explanation is that the diplomats negotiating the Panchsheel Agreement had no clue of the strategic importance of the pass, but this cannot be an excuse.

In the meantime the negotiations took place, but the Chinese remain vague about Wu-Je. According to the Report of the Officials published in 1960, at the third meeting of the Barahoti Conference held in Delhi on 24 April, 1958, the Chinese representative, Counselor Fu Hao officially stated that the area the Chinese called Wu-je was located, "from the south to the north about 15 kilometres approximately and from the east to the west may be a few kilometres less — that is, an area of about 200 square kilometres at most." It was rather vague.

This did not help much.

On June 3, 1958, Subimal Dutt the Foreign Secretary wrote another note to the Prime Minister; this time after the negotiations between India and China on Barahoti were conducted in Delhi between BK Acharya and Fu Hao, the Chinese Counsellor in Delhi.

The talks had reached a stalemate: "Each side has put forward its arguments in favour of its case. The Chinese are contesting our arguments

¹⁵ Bahadur Singh, is the Chargé d'Affaire in the Indian Embassy in Beijing.

and we are, of course, contesting theirs. The only positive suggestion made by the Chinese is that there should be a joint local enquiry. If we do not agree to such an enquiry, no further progress is possible in the present series of talks."

For the Foreign Secretary the question was whether Delhi should accept the Chinese proposal or not. Dutt told the Prime Minister: "I have discussed the position with Shri [BK] Acharya and Shri Gopalachari¹⁶ once more. I agree with them that we should not agree to a local enquiry."

He then explains why: "Our case is that Barahoti is an area of about one and a half square miles. We have given the exact position of this area with reference to its latitude and longitude. The Chinese have not defined which area they mean by Wu-Je. After a good deal of arguments all that they have vouchsafed is that it is an area south of Tunjun-la about 15 kms north to south and 10 kms east to west. This does not define the exact location of the area. If the Chinese claim were conceded, the international boundary would lie south in what is undoubtedly Indian territory. The Chinese are apparently keen on a local enquiry because they will thereby be in a position to define the exact borders of the area which they are claiming."

Dutt's conclusion was that India should ask China: "first to indicate more precisely where according to them the international border lies. Surely they should be able to do so if their claims are genuine."

It may not have been.

Another point, which made sense, was made by Dutt: "We should emphatically refuse to take any oral evidence locally. Barahoti is more easily approachable from Tibet side than from our side. The Chinese would be able to produce any number of Tibetans to say what they would like these people to say. If we agreed to evidence being taken locally, we would have to take a large number of people to the spot from our side. This would result in a

¹⁶ Of the Historical Division of the Ministry

fantastic position. After all we do concede that the Tibetan Sarji has collected taxes from Tibetan traders at Barahoti. It is not necessary to produce oral evidence on this locally."

It is a point to remember: the Barahoti plain is easier of access from the Tibetan side and it would not have been difficult for the Chinese to collect 'evidence', though in 1958, the PLA was clearly vague about the location of the place. One should also add that by changing the name of Barahoti into Wu-Je, the Chinese officials created further confusion.

The conclusions of the Foreign Secretary were interesting, with India giving away the idea of on-the-spot enquiry, what to propose next.

Dutt suggested to the Prime Minister to first have a talk with the Chinese Ambassador: "He is due back in Delhi about the middle of the month. I propose to adhere to our standpoint in regard to the local enquiry. The Ambassador will probably make another reference to his Government. We shall then wait for his final reply."

Dutt further advised that "PM may consider writing to the Chinese Premier. It is true that so far as Barahoti itself is concerned, it would really be immaterial even if we conceded that the Chinese border lies a few miles to the south. The present discussions have however revealed that the Chinese Government are not prepared to accept our northern border as shown on our maps, because these maps are supposed to have been prepared by British colonialists surreptitiously. They are also not prepared to accept the passes mentioned in the 1954 agreement as border passes and thereby indirectly repudiate the principle of watershed as marking the international boundary. We cannot afford to make concessions on either of these two points."

The correspondence between the Prime Ministers would take place a year later, but the issue had certainly been further complicated by the fact that Tunjun-la had been omitted from the Panchsheel Agreement. Would have

this pass be mentioned, India's argument would have definitively been stronger.

The Foreign Secretary requested the Prime Minister's direction on another point: "The Chinese Government have declined to accept our suggestion that no civil official on their side should visit Barahoti pending the conclusion of the present talks. I think we should also send a civil official on our side on a temporary visit ostensibly to exercise authority over our area, look after the graying ground etc."

Subimal Dutt added: "We can tell the Chinese in advance what we propose to do so and express the hope that each side will take care that no local controversy arises on account of the presence of the civil officials of the two Governments. If we do not take some such step, the Chinese official is bound, in the context of the present arguments, to show greater authority and exercise it more openly than has been the case in the past."

He was absolutely right, but the stalemate still continues nearly 60 years later.

Another issue would soon crop up; China claimed two more areas as theirs: Sangchamalla and Lapthal. It was strange that these two localities had not been mentioned by the Chinese diplomats earlier. It was clearly an after-thought.

In 1960, the Report of the Official noted: "Wu-je was regarded as a wedge of territory claimed by China and flanked on both sides by Indian territory. Sangchamalla and Lapthal had in fact never been claimed by either the Chinese or the Tibetan Government till then, and the Indian Government had been maintaining check-posts at these two places."

The 1960 Report further mentioned: "In the winter of 1958, when according to usual practice, the Indian border check-posts retired south, Chinese patrols for the first time intruded into these two places; in 1959 the Chinese Government put forward a claim to these places; and now for the first time

it was stated that Wu-je, Sangchamalla and Lapthal formed one composite area and the Chinese side claimed not merely these three places but also the territory lying between them, even though in the description given at an early stage of the meetings, Wu-je, Sangchamalla and Lapthal were specified as three separate places."

At that time, the Indian negotiators showed that the traditional and customary boundary in this sector was along the watershed range, (i.e. the passes of Tsangchok La, Mana, Niti, Tunjun-la, Balcha Dhura, Kungri Bingri, Darma and Lipulekh). But China did not budge.

Post negotiations, the situation deteriorates

One would have thought that after the negotiations, the situation would improve on the ground, but on August 2, 1958, the Chinese Counsellor in India gave a new note to the Ministry complaining that on July 8, 1958, "more than twenty Indian Personnel entered into Wu-Je of the Tibet Region of China, bringing with them wireless communication apparatus, arms, etc. They said they were sent there by the Government of India to keep watch over the place. ...It is attempted to change the existing situation of Wu-Je and to create new dispute."

A week later, Delhi answered that it was some "normal revenue settlement operations".

The India reply continued: "While the Government of India were and are of the view that during the pendency of the negotiations neither side should send civil officials to the area, they cannot agree to only one side sending their civil officials to Barahoti."

The Chinese had sent civil officials to the area on June 29: "The Government of India, therefore, had no option but to instruct the Government of Uttar Pradesh to send their civil officials also to the area."

The ministry also pointed out that as "Barahoti is within Indian territory, it was not obligatory on the Government of India to inform the Government of the People's Republic of China regarding the movement of their civil officials in their own territory."

Delhi also denied that the India officials were carrying arms.

On December 10, another note was given to a Chinese official in Delhi.

The same points were repeated. It noted that the Indian Revenue Party left Barahoti on September 9, but soon after Delhi was informed that

"immediately after the departure of Indian Party, a Chinese Party carrying with them arms and ammunition entered the Barahoti area and camp there.

They have been further informed that on the 26th September this Chinese Party was reinforced by another 25 fully armed military personnel."

Though already in 1955, Delhi had proposed to 'neutralise' the area, it was never accepted by China.

In a memorandum in June 1956, the Assistant Foreign Minister of China said that "both sides might refrain from sending troops into the Wu-Je area". The Government of India agreed and in February 1957, the Chinese Government confirmed that they would not send troops to the Hoti area 'this year'. As a result no forces were sent by either side during 1957.

On April 19, 1958, the Foreign Secretary reiterated the proposal and the Ambassador accepted it: "I agree with the suggestion which Mr. Dutt has just made, viz., before the Wu-Je question is solved, both sides will not send troops there," he said.

The note further discussed the bilateral 'exchanges', but the issue of the new claims issue came up. China had started claiming these two other places well-south of the watershed: "Lapthal (latitude 30° 44' N: Longitude 80° 8'E) and Sangcha Malla side of the Balcha Dhura Pass (latitude 30° 40' N: longitude 80° 12' E) which is considered as traditional boundary between India and China."

Beijing was told: "These places have never before been claimed either by the Government of China or by the local authorities in the Tibet region of China. The Government of India have been maintaining Indian check-posts at these two places for several years. Due to climatic conditions these check-posts retired as usual in October this year, Chinese personnel entered into Indian territory and established out-posts at both the places."

In an ironical tone, the Indian communication told Beijing that they "trusted that the information that they have received is incorrect and would request the Chinese Embassy to confirm the position immediately."

The posts had again been changed.

Exchange of letters between Nehru and Zhou Enlai

On January 23, 1959, the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai wrote to the Indian Prime Minister about the border.

It first acknowledged Nehru's praise about the Great Leap Forward: "It is true that, through the joint efforts of the entire Chinese people, our country made in industrial and agricultural production in 1958 an advance which we describe as a great leap forward."

Zhou said that his Government "heartily welcomes the sending by the Indian Government of two delegations to study our agriculture and iron and steel industry respectively."

When one know that some 50 million Chinese perished due these policies, one can only smile.

Then Zhou came to the boundary, he asserted: "I wish to point out that the Sino-Indian boundary has never been formally delimited. Historically no treaty or agreement on the Sino-Indian boundary has ever been concluded between the Chinese central government and the Indian Government."

The Premier further rub salt in the Indian wound: "the border question was not raised in 1954 when negotiations were being held between the Chinese

and Indian sides for the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India. This was because conditions were not yet ripe for its settlement."

Regarding Barahoti, Zhou noted that in the recent there were some minor border incidents "which are probably difficult to avoid pending the formal delimitation of the boundary."

He offered to maintain the status-quo, "that is to say, each side keep for the time being to the border areas at present under its jurisdiction and not go beyond them"

He then refers to the 1958 'consultations' on the issue: "As to the negotiations regarding Wu-Je, we also regret very much that no agreement has yet been reached, as we formerly thought a solution would not be difficult to achieve through negotiations and on-the-spot investigations."

On March 22, 1959, nine days before the Dalai Lama was granted refuge in India, Nehru wrote a long longer to Premier Zhou Enlai his Chinese counterpart.¹⁷ Let us not forget that an uprising of the population in Lhasa took place on March 10, 1959; subsequently the Dalai Lama will flee the Tibetan capital and take refuge to India; something China never forgave.

On March 22, Nehru was answering Zhou's letter of January 23.

Among several other issues regarding the border, Nehru mentioned Barahoti: "As regards Barahoti (which you call Wu-Je), I agree with you that its rightful ownership should be settled by negotiation. During the talks held last year, we provided extensive documentary proofs that this area has been under Indian jurisdiction and lies well within our frontiers. An on-the-spot investigation could hardly throw any useful light until proofs to the contrary could be adduced."

¹⁷ Letter to the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of People's Republic of China.

Reproduced from Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, *Notes, Memoranda and Letters Exchanged and Agreements Signed Between the Governments of India and China, 1954-1959*. White Paper (New Delhi, 1959), pp. 55-57.

The Prime Minister continued: "Nevertheless, we were agreeable to both sides agreeing not to send their civil and military officials to the area. Unfortunately, your delegation did not agree to our suggestion. I learn that a material change in the situation has since been effected by the despatch of Chinese civil and military detachments, equipped with arms, to camp in the area after our own civil party had withdrawn at the beginning of last winter. If the reports that we have received about an armed Chinese party camping and erecting permanent structures in Hoti during winter are correct, it would seem that unilateral action, not in accordance with customs, was being taken in assertion of your claim to the disputed area."

The PLA always used the same tactic, whether it is in Barahoti or today in the South China Sea: they advanced their pawn and put the other party in front of a fait accompli and then to offer to negotiate a deal.

Nehru was still hopeful; "a study of the foregoing paragraphs will convince you that not only is the delineation of our frontier, as published in our maps, based on natural and geographical features but that it also coincides with tradition and over a large part is confirmed by international agreements." He added that Independent India would be the last country to make any encroachments beyond its well-established frontiers.

It was not the case with China.

The Barahoti issue in the Lok Sabha¹⁸

The issue was hotting up. Several Members of Parliament started questioning the Government.

On May 8, 1959, a first series of questions were asked to the Prime Minister: (a) whether the negotiations with the Chinese Government regarding the occupation of the Bara Hoti Plateau and other places situated on the border

¹⁸ August 28, 1959. Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. XXXIII, cols 4756-4760.

of Tibet adjoining Uttar Pradesh by the Chinese soldiers have since been concluded; and (b) if so, the outcome thereof?¹⁹

The Deputy Minister of External Affairs, Lakshmi Menon laconically answered "The negotiations have not yet been resumed."

During a short debate, Ram Krishan Gupta asked: "May I know since when this area is under the control and occupation of the Chinese Government?"

The minister remained vague: "It is neither under the control nor occupation of the Chinese."

Another MP, DC Sharma enquired if the Government was aware of the approximate number of the Chinese soldiers who are stationed on this border between Tibet and U.P.

Jawaharlal Nehru answered: "How can we say the numbers of Chinese forces on the other side? But at these places, that is, the Hoti border, thus far, in the past years I mean, small patrols have come - may be, 10, 20, 25, 30 not more than that - and on our side also relatively small patrols of police have gone; there have been no large numbers involved anywhere."

Bhakt Darshan, an MP asked: "Is it true that during this summer when our soldiers reached this place after the snows melted, there was no trace of Chinese soldiers there? Does this imply that the Chinese Government has taken back its claim?"

Nehru confirmed that the Indian patrol had not seen any Chinese, "But what it implies I cannot say".

Dr. Ram Subhag Singh insisted: "What is the situation now? Under whose occupation is Bara Hoti village? Is our patrol party there or not?"

The Prime Minister explained: "It should be kept in mind that the flat area there comprises of about one and a half square miles. It is a small plain area and in the winter one cannot even go there. During summers goats and sheep, etc., come there for grazing and come mostly from Tibet because

¹⁹ The question was asked by Ram Krishan Gupta and seven other MPs.

there are very big mountains on this side. Only our police party from Uttar Pradesh is present at the spot now, no one else."

Vidya Charan Shukla a Congress Madhya Pradesh asked if the Government had written to the Chinese: "if so, whether those letters have been replied or even acknowledged by them?"

Nehru was rather vague: "On this particular matter, I do not think many letters have been sent; maybe, perhaps, it might have been mentioned in some communication, but he had those discussions and they were adjourned saying that there will be a future meeting. Since then, as the House very well knows, so many other things have happened, so many other developments have taken place that, that rather minor matter has gone into the background."

Bhakta Darshan remarked: "Last year when it started to snow and our policemen returned, the Chinese came and occupied that spot," he wanted to know whether some arrangement was "being made to enable our policemen to remain there even during winter so that if Chinese soldiers come, they may be removed."

Nehru did see any reason to do so: "You are right in saying that last year, about one and a half years ago, when our people came away from there, a few Chinese soldiers came there even during winter. Now, apparently, I see no special reason to make our people suffer miserably for this, to make them sit there in winter, in the cold."

Braj Raj Singh questioned the Government further: "Are we to presume that the negotiations have now been abandoned?"

The Prime Minister said: "No, they have not been abandoned. May I say this in answer to the previous question that it was decided at the time of those negotiations that no fully armed party should remain there and that that area of 1 ¼ square miles should be considered, well, if you like, a neutral territory till a decision is made. So it is still pending a final decision. Our

police party that is there has not, in accordance with that decision, taken even the normal arms which, I think, may be required to scare away wild animals, etc., because the decision was that no party, either Indian or Chinese should go there with guns and the like."

The future Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee then asked "the strength of the Chinese forces who occupy Bara Hoti and if there is any likelihood of further encroachment into our territory?"

Nehru replied with humour: "I think I have answered that question. It was in Hindi which I think is sufficiently understood by the Hon. Member."

Bhakt Darshan enquired about the joint survey: "Some time back, perhaps two or three years ago, the Chinese Government had agreed that a representative from its side and a representative of the Indian Government will go there and put an end to this matter. I wish to know whether the Chinese Government has given up that idea or it is still ready to send a representative there from its side."

The Prime Minister gave a strange answer: "It was agreed in that meeting that the place be visited and surveyed." As we have seen, it is not a factual statement, but Nehru added: "But I could not understand, and even now I cannot understand that how will anybody decide this matter sitting on the mountain peaks. The area is not populated. It is a matter of maps. It can be settled with whatever papers they may have or whatever reports we may have. How will it be decided sitting there or walking about on the mountain?" The maps, at least from the Chinese side were not very accurate, as we have seen.

The last question was from Vidya Charan Shukla: "If this plateau is within our boundary, may I know the reason why we accepted the condition of the Chinese that our forces also will not go there with arms?"

It made sense, was it not conceding the area before the negotiations were completed, just for the sake of 'peace' with the Chinese?

Nehru could only say: "It is in our territory; nevertheless, it was a small disputed area. For three or four years, small groups, platoon of the Chinese and platoon of our forces sat there, both facing each other; not exactly coming into conflict but they were sitting there, both of them, and they were camping in the same place. We were discussing, according to the maps and charts what should be the future of this little strip. We agreed that neither party should sit in armed troops to occupy it while we were discussing it." And as late as the Summer of 2016, the Chinese came again.

Another Debate in the Lok Sabha

Another debate took place on November 27, 1959²⁰. In course of a debate, Nehru complained: his government has been charged. "Why did you walk out of Bara Hoti? Why did you do this? You made a statement in September last and in November you tell us that you walked out of there."

He then gave a long explanation on the government's position: "First of all, we have always walked out of Bara Hoti during winter because, broadly speaking I do not say it is impossible to live there; it is unlivable and uninhabitable in winter. Of course, it is a conceivable possibility that if necessity arose and when there is vast urgency one can do anything. One can go to the North Pole or to the South Pole. That is a different matter. But we have retired and China has retired from there because the place is unlivable. So far as we are concerned, it is, roughly, approachable for five months in the year, that is, the approach routes to Bara Hoti, on China side too, are in other months difficult-the high passes which lead to Bara Hoti are blocked. A person may live there, certainly, with difficulty, but he just cannot travel to and fro in the rest of India for seven months in the year. As I said, one can always do everything if danger threatens and necessity arises. But the idea of living there or putting our people there, cut off from

²⁰ November 27, 1959; Lok Sabha Debates, Second Series, Vol XXXV, cols 2185-2213

the rest of India for seven months more or less, unless there is urgent necessity, did not seem to me obvious at all or something that was demanded by the honour or interests or the defence of India."

It was before the Siachen glacier became a bone of contention between India and China. But the point was that the Chinese were able to stay in Barahoti in winter, while the Indian troops were not.

Then, the Prime Minister recalled the April 1958 negotiations with China; he said: "Then again, we had arrived at an arrangement with the Chinese Government some two or three years ago -- three years ago, maybe- particularly about this matter that they would not put any armed personnel there and we would not do so. Of course, you will say, 'Why did you come to such an arrangement?' Well, I am sorry that I disagree. When there are any disputes - I am not talking about these big scale border troubles and almost a mountainous invasion and all that; that is a different matter - but when there are disputes as there are plenty of disputes between two countries, they have always to be discussed and arrangements are arrived at."

The problem is that historically part of the Chinese tactics to advance slowly, creating small disputes, while progressing nevertheless on Indian soil.

Nehru explained the policy of his government 'when such disputes arise': "It was therefore agreed that neither they nor we will send armed personnel there. We have both kept by that in the last two or three years. In summer we go. We did not agree about our withdrawal or not - there is no agreement-but it was by force of circumstances. They withdrew. We withdrew. So, we have been sending our civil personnel there not that the civil personnel do any civil administration there, but they sit there and they will sit there, of course."

His final submission was that one should not attach too much importance "to these matters and becoming touchy about them rather distorts the picture in our minds. We seem to think that we are going to decide these major

matters by, let us say, what they did in the old days. Two persons would fight if a moustache was a little longer or shorter or a little higher or lower. That kind of thing does not apply to these grave national problems.”

It is how India lost so much territory to China. Less than two years later, the Prime Minister would realize on the slopes of the Taghla ridge and the desert of Ladakh, how wrong his policy with China was.

Another issue was to be raised in the coming weeks: the occupation of the Aksai Chin and the construction of a road through the Indian territory.

Nehru continued to belittle Barahoti: “I have no objection to talks about Bara Hoti or one or two other places. These are limited cases of border [disputes]. Where there is a dispute, let us discuss it. How many hon. Members here, who have warmly protested against our coming out of Bara Hoti, known even the facts about Bara Hoti? But, it is resentment, a justified resentment because they feel that with the Chinese pushing themselves here and there, we must not put up. I can understand that emotional reaction to it. ...So, I had no objection to discussing Bara Hoti or one or two other matters which I might mention. We have inherited the dispute not since the Chinese came but from before that.”

As we have seen, there might have been some vague claims from the Tibetan side when Tibet was an Independent nation, but at that time the police or paramilitary forces were never sent in the area.

The situation had only developed after the signature of the Panchsheel which officialize the occupation of Tibet.

The Negotiation of 1960

The imbroglio continued during meetings of the Officials of India and China on the border issue.

As we have seen, China had added two more claims in 1959.

According to the Report published in 1960, at the third meeting of the Barahoti Conference held in Delhi on 24 April, 1958, the Chinese representative, Counselor Fu Hao officially was vague about the location of Wu-je; it was located, "from the south to the north about 15 kilometres approximately and from the east to the west may be a few kilometres less — that is, an area of about 200 square kilometres at most."

The description was hazy to say the least.

A year later, though these two localities had not been mentioned by the Chinese side, Beijing claimed Sangchamalla and Laphthal. It was a new addition.

The report said: "Wu-je was regarded as a wedge of territory claimed by China and flanked on both sides by Indian territory. Sangchamalla and Laphthal had in fact never been claimed by either the Chinese or the Tibetan Government till then, and the Indian Government had been maintaining check-posts at these two places."

The 1960 Report further noted: "In the winter of 1958, when according to usual practice, the Indian border check-posts retired south, Chinese patrols for the first time intruded into these two places; in 1959 the Chinese Government put forward a claim to these places; and now for the first time it was stated that Wu-je, Sangchamalla and Laphthal formed one composite area and the Chinese side claimed not merely these three places but also the territory lying between them, even though in the description given at an early stage of the meetings, Wu-je, Sangchamalla and Laphthal were specified as three separate places."

At that time, the Indian negotiators argued that the traditional and customary boundary in this sector lay along the watershed range, along the passes of Tsangchok La, Mana, Niti, Tunjun-la, Balcha Dhura, Kungri Bingri, Darma and Lipulekh.

The Chinese views

During the five-round of talks in 1960, the Chinese had the occasion put up their views. Firstly, they say, the 1954 Sino-Indian Agreement is an agreement on trade and intercourse between the Tibet region of China and India. Not only does none of the paragraphs in this Agreement involve the boundary question but the two sides had an understanding at that time, that is, no boundary question should be touched on in the negotiations.

Therefore, how can it be said that this Agreement confirmed the alignment claimed by the Indian side?

Secondly, precisely because the boundary question was not to be discussed in those negotiations, the two sides did not mention it. How can it be considered that the boundary question does not exist only because at that time the boundary question was not discussed and the two sides did not mention the boundary question?

Thirdly, since the two sides held different views regarding the question of the six passes at that time, they finally agreed to adopt a wording in the agreement, which did not involve the question of ownership of these passes, so as to bypass this difficult question.

Article IV of the 1954 Agreement only provides for the routes by which the traders and pilgrims of one country travel to the other. It does not touch specifically the location of the boundary. No matter whether viewed from the spirit of the 1954 Agreement, or from its real contents or the process in which agreement was reached on this Article, one cannot interpret this Article as having confirmed the Sino-Indian boundary.

(4) It should be pointed out with emphasis that Prime Minister Nehru did not consider that the middle sector of the alignment claimed by India has treaty and agreement basis, even when he stressed that there were treaties and agreements concerning the eastern and western sectors. In his letter of March 22, 1959 to Premier Chou En-lai, Prime Minister Nehru, after

mentioning that the Indian side considered that there were treaty basis for the boundary between China and Sikkim, for the boundary between Ladakh and Tibet and for the eastern sector for the Sino-Indian boundary.

The Chinese conveniently forget other parts of the letter which explain: "As regards Barahoti (which you call Wu-Je), I agree with you that its rightful ownership should be settled by negotiation. During the talks held last year, we provided extensive documentary proofs that this area has been under Indian jurisdiction and lies well within our frontiers. An on-the-spot investigation could hardly throw any useful light until proofs to the contrary could be adduced. Nevertheless, we were agreeable to both sides agreeing not to send their civil and military officials to the area. Unfortunately, your delegation did not agree to our suggestion. I learn that a material change in the situation has since been effected by the despatch of Chinese civil and military detachments, equipped with arms, to camp in the area after our own civil party had withdrawn at the beginning of last winter. If the reports that we have received about an armed Chinese party camping and erecting permanent structures in Hoti during winter are correct, it would seem that unilateral action, not in accordance with customs, was being taken in assertion of your claim to the disputed area."

The 1960 negotiations led nowhere.

A Temporary Epilogue

Sixty years later, wvery summer, the Indian media is crying full play: "The Chinese have come again". Reports originating from a remote part of Uttarakhand say the Chinese Dragon stroke again.

To quote from an example, in July 2016, *The Times of India* wrote: "It all began on July 22, when an Indian team of 19 civilians led by a Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) first entered into the area in Barahoti in Chamoli, Uttrakhand, an area perceived by Chinese as their territory near

the line of actual control (LAC). Six Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) personnel, in civil clothes and unarmed, accompanied the Indian civilians 200 metres inside the 'alleged disputed' territory."

The Chinese troops PLA prevented the Indians paramilitary forces from going further and asked them to return: "No soon did the Indian team return, the Chinese PLA came in exactly 200 metres inside. Seeing the aggressive stance, Indian side led by ITBP asked the Chinese team to return to their original position."

The story is not finished: three days later on July 25, China sent a helicopter close to the area for the first time. Did he crossed the LAC (as perceived by India is not clear). But this was evidently to intimidate the ITBP.

After reports were wired to Dehra Dun and Delhi, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Harish Rawat confirmed the incursion by Chinese troops in Barahoti: "The good thing is they (Chinese) have not touched an important canal there. This is a matter of concern. Our border has been peaceful. We have asked to increase vigilance. I am sure the central government will take cognizance of the issue," Rawat said.

The Government of India, as usual, played down the incident. The then Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiren Rijuju said, "Nature of breach (by Chinese) is not severe. An incident at the border has occurred but it not a major breach. Both forces returned back to their previous positions."

Perhaps, but the fact remains that the ITBP personnel were not carrying firearms which are not allowed as per an agreed protocol signed in 2005 and reiterated in 2013, while Chinese were carrying arms and wearing uniforms. The place is so remote that independent witness finds it difficult to access. On June 4, 2017, PTI reported: "Two helicopters of the People's Liberation Army of China hovered over Chamoli district in Uttarakhand, triggering concern in India's security establishment about the fourth such incursion into Indian airspace since March this year."

This was two weeks before the beginning of the Doklam episode. The news agency added: "Official sources said the choppers, which returned to the Chinese side after about five minutes, could have carried out aerial photography of Indian ground troops during what was possibly a reconnaissance mission."

Already a year earlier, the PLA is said to have increased their incursions on the Tibet-Uttarakhand border: "Violating all norms, the People Liberation Army has stormed into the Bara Hoti area, several times this year.

Even after the 'Wuhan Consensus', when President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi tried to find a *modus operandi* on the border to avoid incidents like in Doklam, there was one Chinese intrusion and one aerial violation in 2018, and one helicopter violation in 2019.

Annexure

1962: Face to Face with the PLA

By Lt Gen Baljit Singh

Indian Defence Review

June 30, 2014

Captain Baljit Singh was awarded The Chief of Army Staff Commendation Card for gallantry and distinguished service for his excellent route-charting work at Bara Hoti, 17,000 ft

...In the backdrop of brazen Chinese intransigence all along the Himalayan water-shed, in mid March 1962 I was ordered to proceed forthwith to Head Quarters, 9 Infantry Brigade Group at Lucknow.

Two days later, as I sat facing Brigadier Bireshwar Nath (a burly and blustering six foot plus), he handed me a signal from Army Headquarters marked, 'Top Secret and Personal for the Commander', directing the Brigadier to establish an Army post at the Rim-Kin ridge which dominated the Bara Hoti Grazing Ground (BGG), the soonest but not later than 15 May, 1962. And that Captain Baljit Singh was to command the BGG Special Task Force (STF) till the Rim-Kin perimeter defence was effectively established. The Brigadier then led me to an adjoining room, one wall of which was covered with maps of BGG and Tibet. He placed his index finger over a map and said (words to the effect), "this is BGG which the Chinese intend to usurp from India. I have personally picked 120 of the fittest and highly motivated soldiers from the 14 Rajput Battalion, to constitute the Rim-Kin STF. Your task lies in inducting them from Ghamsali onwards either en block or in dribblets across the Chor Hoti Pass, approximately 16,000ft ASL. You have a Carte Blanche sanction from the Army Headquarters to hire/purchase

specialized equipment and mountain guides and travel any-where in the Country, to do so. Any questions?"

I hadn't quite grasped what had been placed in my lap and so said, "I would like to meet you tomorrow, Sir, with my tentative plan and meanwhile would your staff kindly book me on a flight to Bagdogra ex Delhi, the day after.

And concurrently, could the 120 brave-hearts of the STF be flown to Srinagar to imbibe the fundamentals of the physiological and psychological challenges of living and soldiering above 12,000ft ASL, at our Ski Warfare School, Gulmarg." The Brigadier looked distinctly uncomfortable to be 'ordered around', by a six year old green horn!

Now why did the Army Headquarters pick on me to command the BGG STF? Well, in 1959-60 I was exposed to snow, rock and ice craft techniques under the tutelage of Tenzing Norgay at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling. With this BGG STF challenge thrown at me, I was intuitively driven to seek out Mr Tenzing for technical counseling. Mr Tenzing heard me out and reminded me that just as I and my fellow students were led across the Zongri Pass (14,000 ft) to the Base Camp, the BGG STF should be handled by me on the same lines. Period! And he made available four High Altitude Sherpa Guides who would procure adequate equipment for getting the STF up to and across the Chor Hoti Pass. For the first time in days, I felt reassured to handle the assigned task.

In the meanwhile, Lt Col KM Pandalai of the 14 Rajput, had had the basic rations of the STF for a period of 10 days, moved on ponies from Joshimath to Ghamsali, beyond which there were foot paths only. The final launch pad to get across the Chor Hoti was Kala Zabar (KZ), 14,500ft ASL, a day-long tough ascent especially for men laden with 25 kg of personal kit and food stuffs. I felt that KZ ought to have at least 3 days food stocks which had to be humped by soldiers; tough going but paid dividends in acquiring a measure of acclimatization to high altitude duties.

The four Sherpas and I had preceded the STF by four days. The Chor Hoti ridge was a narrow horse shoe, with 10 to 15 feet of snow deposit. Once the sun touched the area, the ascent was very exhausting, even for seasoned climbers. The descent from Chor Hoti was down a near vertical rock face and we set to fix two Manila-hemp ropes of 150 ft length each. The going beyond for about three km was over an almost level, snowed up plateau, ending at another rock step. Here again, two rope hand-rails were fixed for 250 ft, ending close to the spine of the Rim-Kin ridge, our ultimate goal post! We bivouacked for the night, unarmed and taking comfort that the Brigadier did not expect the PLA to show up before mid May! On the return journey, we marked the entire route (bamboo sticks with red cloth streamers), right up to KZ.

By 17 April, Capt R.S. Taragi with 30 STF soldiers had concentrated at KZ. We decided to make the first push, leaving KZ at 2300 hrs, on April 19. The snow on the approaches to Chor Hoti was firm and compacted by night and by 0400 hrs on 20 April, all of us were atop the Chor Hoti saddle. The descent using fixed ropes was a new experience for the soldiers and almost all of them had to be led, one by one, by myself and the Sherpas. In the event, the last man reached Rim-Kin at 1845 hrs on 20 April, 1962 and in so doing consolidated India's claim on BGG. In truth, I must admit that they were so exhausted that they could have been taken hostages without a murmur, at the mere asking.

The PLA detachment of ten soldiers with 30 laden ponies arrived on 12 May, 1962 and attempted to bypass the RCP.

We had one radio set of American origin, somewhat dated, with an independent power source which had to be cranked manually for the duration of the transmission. But it worked! I communicated the news to the control at Joshimath and Lucknow using the Morse-key and requested for air-drop of tentage and basic food as per an agreed plan. There was no

acknowledgement but on 22 April, we were awoken by the drone of aircraft over Rim-Kin. In the next twenty minutes, the two Dakotas dropped their cargo creating a cloud of floating white parachutes over Rim-Kin. And creating special history for many of us. Unfortunately, on touch down the white parachutes spread up to 2 km all around, merged with the snow and we could detect and retrieve only about 20 % of the cargo.

On 24 April, the Sherpas and I guided the second batch of 30 STF soldiers to Rim-Kin. Accompanying this batch were also 15 Constables of the UP Armed Constabulary who on 26 April set up a Revenue Collection Post (RCP), for monitoring the graziers' pasturing in the BGG. The RCP was sited about 800 meters ahead of Rim-Kin, within effective fire-coverage of MMGs, if need be. The BGG is a gigantic amphitheater of 13,500ft ASL mean elevation. On its NW and SW rim, are ridges one to three thousand feet higher than the BGG plateau-floor.

But its NE rim which forms the International boundary with Tibet (China) is barely 500 ft higher than the surroundings, a gateway to BGG over the Tun Jan La [Tun Jun-la] (14,500 ft ASL) for the PLA.

Tun Jan La is also the origin of a stream which goes past the NE tip of the Rim-Kin ridge and ultimately flows into the Dhauli Ganga, near Malari; thus leaving no doubt that Tun Jan La is the water-shed ridge, per se.

The Sherpas and I walked down the stream for about 4 km and felt that a mule track (ultimately a motor able road) from Malari to Rim-Kin may be possible and provide an all year access to Rim-kin by avoiding the Chor Hoti obstacle in the future, altogether.

The Armed Constabulary were fully established by 27 April and the Indian National Flag was hoisted with full military symbolism, including a bugle-call. Henceforth, this ceremony was performed daily. The PLA detachment of ten soldiers with 30 laden ponies arrived on 12 May, 1962 and attempted to bypass the RCP. We obstructed their attempts, physically blocking their

maneuvering and all the while drawing their attention to the fluttering Tri-Colour.

After a few minute of heated gesticulations, the PLA pitched their tents about 20 meters away from the RCP. We offered them a kettle of hot tea but they turned their backs and got inside a disused, graziers stone-walled enclosure. Sadly for the RCP, the 30 ponies of the PLA were the only live stock that pastured in the BGG and they refused to pay the revenue!

In mid June 1962, I handed my report at the Military Operations Directorate at the Army Headquarters. A week later I was summoned by Brigadier DK Palit, Vr C, the Director Military Operations. He asked me whether Rim-Kin could be a permanent military presence and how?

I pitched for an immediate survey of the Tun Jan La stream from its confluence near Malari, up to Rim-Kin, by the Army Engineers detachment at Joshimath to check the road building feasibility. This indeed turned out to be do-able and track construction began in right earnest, the same year.

Another recommendation which the DMO accepted was, that for air-drops in snow bound areas, we must manufacture parachutes of Red and Orange colours. This too was implemented by 1963.

The above narrative suggests that PM Nehru's China-border policy-construct flowed more from the ground realities rather than his oft insinuated proclivity for, Hindi Chini Bhai Bahi bonhomie. The Chinese perfidy in BGG had come to light in 1958-59 when taking advantage of the Border Trade Agreement (over eight mutually nominated passes), the PLA simply took possession of the un-held Tun Jan La, named it Hu Ji [Wuje] and set up a PLA post at the site where we ultimately confronted them on 12 May, 1962. By hoisting the Tri-Colour at the chosen RCP, did India compromise its claim to the water-shed at Tun Jan La, about 3 km ahead of Rim-Kin?

Perhaps yes, but considering what it took to deploy at and hold Rim-Kin, and the inadequacy of our numerical presence, reliable logistics and fire-power,

there is no way that we could have hoisted and retained the Tri-Colour at Tun Jan La. However, today we could think on those lines as indeed the Late General Sunderji had demonstrated in the Sumdorong Chhu valley in 1987, where he forced the Chinese to back-off. The General was able to deploy a better part of an entire Army Corps North of the Se La [Sela] massif, in less than a month, with attendant logistics and fire power and showed us the way forward. It is time to shake off sloth, raise the additional Field Formations for a possible contingency in the trans-Himalayas and be counted among the comity of Nations, as a truly emerged power in South Asia.