



CURRENT AFFAIRS



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INDIA – BHUTAN RELATIONS

This article covers “Daily Current Affairs” and the topic details “India – Bhutan Relations”. The topic “India – Bhutan Relations” has relevance in the International Relation section of the UPSC CSE exam.

For Prelims:

Key treaties and Agreements Between India and Bhutan?

For Mains:

GS 2: International Relation

Challenges in India-Bhutan Relations?

Way forward?

Why in the news:

In a recent development, China and Bhutan convened the 13th Expert Group Meeting (EGM) in Beijing, with a primary focus on boundary delimitation. This event notably led to the formation of a collaborative Joint Technical Team responsible for delineating the China-Bhutan boundary.

Key Highlights of the Meeting?

- The 13th Expert Group Meeting was marked by both nations reaffirming their dedication to accelerating initiatives to resolve the contested border issue.
- A blueprint was established for the imminent 14th round of boundary discussions to uphold the positive momentum.
- Deliberations during the meeting centred on the execution of the Three-Step Road Map, underscoring the resolve to adhere to the prescribed approach for expediting boundary negotiations.

Implications for India’s Strategic Interests

In the context of recent developments in China-Bhutan relations, India’s strategic interests are being closely observed, particularly in the Doklam tri-junction, where the borders of India, Bhutan, and China converge.

- China has notably revived its territorial claim over **Bhutan’s eastern region, Sakteng**, which encompasses a Wildlife Sanctuary and **shares its borders with India’s Arunachal Pradesh state**. This region is of paramount importance as China asserts its dominion over Arunachal Pradesh, referring to it as **“South Tibet.”**
- The implications of this claim extend beyond Bhutan’s boundaries, potentially serving as both a pressure tactic to coax Bhutan into acceding to its boundary-related demands and a direct challenge to India’s sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh.

- Bhutan, historically a strong ally of India in the region, has traditionally received substantial economic and military support from India. Nonetheless, recent times have witnessed an increase in China's economic and diplomatic engagement with Bhutan, potentially diluting India's influence in the area. This evolving dynamic underscores the importance of monitoring the situation as it could impact India's strategic standing.



Historical and Cultural Bonds:

- The foundation of India's relations with Bhutan is deeply embedded in shared cultural heritage, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and various other traditions.
- Many Bhutanese pilgrims journey to India's sacred sites like Bodh Gaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, Sikkim, and Udayagiri, reflecting the spiritual ties between the two nations.
- Bhutan notably stood among the initial nations to acknowledge India's sovereignty and independence in 1947. This acknowledgement began an enduring alliance characterized by Bhutan's consistent support for India's progress and modernization.



Strategic Collaboration and Security Cohesion:

- The **1949 Treaty of Friendship between India and Bhutan**, revised in 2007, is a testament to their enduring relationship, emphasizing mutual respect for sovereignty and non-interference in internal matters.
- India's contributions to Bhutan encompass a range of critical areas such as defence, infrastructure, and communication. These contributions are pivotal in preserving Bhutan's territorial integrity and autonomous governance.
- An illustrative instance of the bond's strength emerged during the 2017 Doklam standoff involving India and China. Bhutan played a pivotal role by permitting Indian troops to access its territory to counter Chinese encroachments, highlighting the solidarity and cooperation shared between the two nations.

Economic Collaboration and Development Partnership:

- The **India-Bhutan Trade, Commerce, and Transit Agreement, initially signed in 1972 and updated in 2016**, establishes a framework for free trade between the two nations.
- Notably, **India stands as Bhutan's largest trading partner**, accompanied by economic aid directed towards Bhutan's socio-economic advancement. The focus sectors include agriculture, irrigation, infrastructure, energy, health, education, and culture.
- Key exports from India to Bhutan include petrol, diesel, passenger cars, rice, wood charcoal, cellphones, soya-bean oil, excavators, electric generators, motors, and turbine parts.
- Conversely, prominent imports from Bhutan to India encompass electricity, betel nut, oranges, semi-finished iron or non-alloy steel products, and boulders.
- India's dominant role in Bhutan's investment landscape is evident, **contributing to 50% of the country's total foreign direct investment (FDI)**.

Hydropower Collaboration:

- A robust hydropower partnership thrives within the **framework of the 2006 Agreement on Cooperation in Hydropower**.
- India's commitment to assisting Bhutan in developing a minimum of 10,000 MW of hydropower and importing surplus electricity from this capacity by 2020 underscores their energy collaboration.
- Operational hydroelectric projects, including **Chhukha, Kurichu, Tala, and Mangdechhu, with a total capacity of 2136 MW**, contribute significantly to Bhutan's electricity supply to India.
- Additionally, the implementation of two hydropower projects, **Punatsangchhu-I and Punatsangchhu-II**, under the Inter-Governmental mode is in progress.

Multilateral Engagement:

- Both nations actively participate in multilateral forums such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (**SAARC**), **BBIN** (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal), and **BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), fostering regional cooperation and collaboration.

People-to-People Connections:

- Approximately 50,000 Indian citizens contribute to Bhutan's workforce, predominantly in sectors like construction, education, and technical consultancy related to infrastructure projects.
- India remains a sought-after educational destination for Bhutanese students, reinforcing strong ties.
- Cultural exchange between India and Bhutan thrives through various avenues, including delegations, artists, scholars, exhibitions, festivals, and more, facilitating a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other's cultures.

Challenges in India-Bhutan Relations:

- **Chinese Presence and Border Tensions:** China's increasing presence in Bhutan, particularly along the disputed border, raises concerns for India due to its strategic implications.

While the India-Bhutan border has largely been peaceful, recent instances of Chinese border incursions like the 2017 Doklam standoff have introduced tensions among India, China, and Bhutan, potentially straining India-Bhutan relations.

- **Hydropower Development:** While India has significantly supported Bhutan's hydropower development, concerns have arisen within Bhutan about the terms of certain projects favouring India. Public opposition to these projects has emerged, leading to internal debates about the best approach to ensure mutual benefits.
- **Trade and Tourism Issues:** India is Bhutan's largest trading partner and a primary source of tourists. However, differences have emerged over trade and tourism policies. Bhutan's concerns regarding the environmental impact of trade and tourism on its delicate ecology and cultural heritage have led to discussions about regulations and potential entry charges for Indian tourists.
- **Education Trends:** Over time, the number of Bhutanese students pursuing tertiary education in India has declined significantly. From constituting 7% of all international students a decade ago, the figure now stands at 3.8%, reflecting changing educational preferences and potential challenges in people-to-people connections between the two countries.

Way Forward

- **Enhanced Regional Engagement:** Strengthening collaboration on regional multilateral platforms will foster stability and serve shared interests. Through such platforms, India and Bhutan can consolidate efforts for regional progress.
- **Open Communication to Ease Border Tensions:** Establishing transparent communication channels involving India, Bhutan, and China will be instrumental in easing border tensions. Open dialogue can contribute to a better understanding of each other's concerns and promote peaceful coexistence.
- **Resolving Hydropower Concerns:** Addressing apprehensions related to hydropower projects necessitates constructive conversations. Fair terms should be discussed to ensure these projects mutually benefit India and Bhutan while upholding their long-standing partnership.
- **Joint Policy Formulation:** A collaborative approach involving establishing a joint committee could facilitate the creation of sustainable policies. These policies should strike a balance between economic growth and the preservation of Bhutan's unique ecology and culture.
- **Education and Skill Development:** India's education and skill development assistance can be manifested through scholarships for Bhutanese students and training programs for professionals. Such initiatives will enhance Bhutan's human resource capabilities and deepen people-to-people ties.

Q.1 Consider the following states of India:

1. West Bengal
2. Arunachal Pradesh
3. Sikkim
4. Assam

How many of the above States share boundary with Bhutan:

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

ANSWER: D

Q.2 Chhukha, Kurichu, Tala, and Mangdechhu hydropower projects that supply significant power to India are in which of the following countries:

- (a) Nepal
- (b) Bangladesh
- (c) Bhutan
- (d) Myanmar

ANSWER: C

Q.3 Analyzing the Evolving Dynamics of India-Bhutan Relations, enumerate the opportunities and challenges ahead.

ISRO'S FUTURE PLANS

This article covers "Daily Current Affairs" and the topic details "ISRO's Future Plans". The topic "ISRO's Future Plans" has relevance in the "ISRO's Future Plans" section of the UPSC CSE exam.

For Prelims:

What is ISRO?

What are its current objectives?

What are its future objectives?

For Mains:

GS3: Science and Technology

Why in the news?

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi proclaimed that **August 23**, the day when the Chandrayaan-3 Lander successfully landed on the moon, will now be recognized as **National Space Day**. Additionally, he unveiled the naming of the **Chandrayaan-3 landing site as "Shiv Shakti point"** and the location of the unsuccessful **Chandrayaan-2 mission's 2019 crash as "Tiranga point."**

About ISRO:

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is India's space agency, focusing on science, engineering, and technology for utilizing outer space's benefits for the nation and humanity.
- Operating under the **Department of Space (DOS)**, ISRO is a key entity responsible for executing the Indian Space Programme.
- **Core objective:** To develop and apply space technology to address various national necessities.

ISRO's Current Objectives:

- **Gaganyaan Human Spaceflight Mission:**
 - The Gaganyaan project is focused on showcasing India's ability to conduct human spaceflight. This involves sending a **3-member crew into a 400 km orbit for a 3-day mission**, safely returning them to Earth via a landing in the Indian sea waters.
 - Astronaut training is in progress alongside a series of tests on the modified Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (HLVM-3) rocket. This comprehensive testing phase aims to ensure the rocket's safety for carrying humans.
- **Reusable Launch Vehicle Technology Demonstrator (RLV-TD):**
 - ISRO is actively conducting tests for the Reusable Launch Vehicle Technology Demonstrator (RLV-TD). This innovation is designed to **enable multiple missions with a single launch vehicle**, departing from the traditional model where each rocket is used only once.
- **Semi-cryogenic Engine SCE-200:**
 - This engine employs **highly refined kerosene (known as "Isrosene") and liquid oxygen as propellants**.
 - The engine's capabilities are being evaluated through rigorous testing and development, with the aim of powering the next generation of ISRO rockets.
- **Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV):**
 - It is a compact rocket, distinct from the larger Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), is designed to efficiently transport lighter satellites into low-earth orbit. The SSLV's streamlined design promises **reduced turnaround time between launches, enhancing operational efficiency**.

ISRO's Future Plans

Major Missions	Description
Aditya L1 Spacecraft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India's first solar mission is scheduled to launch in September 2023 and will study the Sun from a point in space called the Lagrange point L1, which is located about 1.5 million kilometres from Earth. The mission's main objectives are to study the coronal heating and solar wind acceleration, and to understand the initiation of coronal mass ejections (CMEs) and flares.
Modified LVM-3 Flights (Gaganyaan Crew Escape Tests)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two flights of modified LVM-3 to test crew escape system for Gaganyaan mission.
XPoSat Satellite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set to launch in 2023, it is India's first dedicated polarimetry mission, with the goal of exploring the dynamics of astronomical X-ray sources ISRO and the Raman Research Institute (RRI) have collaborated to develop this satellite, positioning it within a low Earth orbit covering 500-700 km.
SSLV Developmental Flight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is capable of launching up to 500 kg satellites to low Earth orbit. The SSLV is a three-stage solid rocket vehicle with a liquid propulsion-based velocity trimming module.
NISAR Satellite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The NISAR satellite constitutes a collaborative initiative between NASA and ISRO aimed at jointly developing and deploying a dual-frequency synthetic aperture radar on an Earth observation satellite positioned in Low Earth Orbit (LEO). The satellite will be the first radar imaging satellite to use dual frequencies and will be used for remote sensing, to observe and understand natural processes on Earth
Gaganyaan G1 and G2 Flights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human-rated LVM-3 rocket flights without crew as part of Gaganyaan mission.
GSAT-20 Satellite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a collaborative effort between the Indian Space Research Organisation Satellite Centre and Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre. Notably, it's set to become ISRO's first satellite to transition from a geostationary transfer orbit (GTO) to a geosynchronous orbit through Electric Propulsion.
Lunar Polar Exploration (LUPEX) Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ISRO and JAXA collaboration, an extension of Chandrayaan-3. Involves a sophisticated Lander and rover to study the moon's South Polar Region, including subsurface sample extraction and 'night survival' demonstration. Moreover, JAXA will provide launch vehicle and rover, while ISRO provides the Lander.

Mars Return Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned return to Mars for further exploration.
Venus Mission ('Shukrayaan')	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned mission to study Venus.
Other Collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ISRO's involvement in launching OneWeb satellites (2022) and expected launch of European Space Agency's PROBA-3 satellites (2024) as alternative providers due to sanctions on Russia.

Sources:

[Explained | After Chandrayaan-3, what has ISRO planned? - The Hindu](#)

Q1. With reference to India's Moon Missions, consider the following statements:

- The Chandrayaan-3 landing site has been named as "Shiv Shakti point" by India.
- The location of the unsuccessful Chandrayaan-1 mission's crash has been named as "Tiranga point."
- The Chandrayaan-3 mission consists of an Orbiter, Lander and a Rover Module.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 only
- None

Answer: (a)

Q2. Consider the following pairs with reference to ISRO's Future Plans:

ISRO's Future Plans	Description
1. Aditya L-1	India's first solar mission and a impact probe
2. LUPEX	a joint project between NASA and ISRO
3. NISAR	ISRO and Japanese Space Agency collaboration
4. XPoSat	India's first dedicated polarimetry mission

How many of the abovementioned pairs are correct ?

- Only one
- Only two
- Only three
- All Four

Answer: (a)

Q3. Discuss the recent and upcoming initiatives of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in the context of its current and future plans. How do these initiatives align with India's technological and strategic aspirations on the global stage?

Gaurav Nikumbh