

**INDIA-BHUTAN RELATIONS**

**Prelims:** International Relations, India- Bilateral Relations

**Mains:** GS-II- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

**Why in News?**

- ▶ Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bhutanese counterpart Lotay Tshering held wide ranging talks and discussed steps to further expand the bilateral partnership across several sectors.

**Highlights:**

- ▶ The two countries signed 10 MoUs in the fields of space research, aviation, IT, power and education.
- ▶ Launched the RuPay Card in Bhutan by making a purchase at Simtokha Dzong, built in 1629 by Shabdrung Namgyal, which functions as a monastic and administrative centre and is one of the oldest dzongs in Bhutan.
- ▶ He said an additional \$100 million will be available to Bhutan under a standby swap arrangement to meet the foreign exchange requirement.
- ▶ Unveiled an e-plaque on the interconnection between India's National Knowledge Network and Bhutan's Druk Research and Education Network.

**Significance of Bhutan for India:**

- ▶ Bhutan's significance to India stems from its geographic location. Nestled in the Himalayas, it is sandwiched between India and China. Thus, it serves as a buffer between the two Asian giants.
- ▶ Bhutan's value as a buffer soared after China annexed Tibet in 1951. As the 2017 crisis in the Doklam region revealed, India will strongly oppose, even militarily, any Chinese attempt to assert control over Doklam. Securing Bhutan's present borders especially its western border is clearly important for India.
- ▶ Doklam in the hands of a hostile power would heighten the vulnerability of India's Siliguri Corridor, a narrow strip of land that links India to its Northeastern states.

## Background:

- ▶▶ Diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan were established in 1968 with the establishment of a special office of India in Thimphu. Before this our relations with Bhutan were looked after by our Political Officer in Sikkim.
- ▶▶ The basic framework of India- Bhutan bilateral relations was the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1949 between the two countries, which was revised in February 2007. The Golden Jubilee of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan is being celebrated in the year 2018.

## Treaty of Friendship:

- ▶▶ On August 8, 1949 Bhutan and India signed the Treaty of Friendship, calling for peace between the two nations and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
- ▶▶ However, Bhutan agreed to let India "guide" its foreign policy and both nations would consult each other closely on foreign and defence affairs. The treaty also established free trade and extradition protocols.
- ▶▶ Scholars regard the effect of the treaty is to make Bhutan into a protected state, but not a protectorate, because Bhutan continues to have the power to conduct its own foreign policy.

## The New Treaty of Friendship 2007:

- ▶▶ India re-negotiated the 1949 treaty with Bhutan and signed a new treaty of friendship in 2007. The new treaty replaced the provision requiring Bhutan to take India's guidance on foreign policy with broader sovereignty and not require Bhutan to obtain India's permission over arms imports.
- ▶▶ India allows 16 entry and exit points for Bhutanese trade with other countries (the only exception being the People's Republic of China) and has agreed to develop and import a minimum of 10,000 megawatts of electricity from Bhutan by 2021.

## Bilateral Cooperation:

- ▶▶ There are a number of institutional mechanisms between India and Bhutan in areas such as security, border management, trade, transit, economic, hydro-power, development cooperation, water resources.
- ▶▶ There have been regular exchanges at the Ministerial and officials' level, exchanges of parliamentary delegations to strengthen partnership in diverse areas of cooperation.

## Hydropower:

- ▶▶ Hydropower Cooperation Hydropower projects in Bhutan are an example of win-win cooperation, providing a reliable source of inexpensive and clean electricity to India, generating export revenue for Bhutan and cementing our economic integration.

- ▶▶ Government of India has constructed three Hydroelectric Projects (HEPs) in Bhutan totalling 1416 MW, which are operational and exporting surplus power to India
- ▶▶ About three-fourth of the power generated is exported and rest is used for domestic consumption.

### **Military Ties:**

- ▶▶ India has strong military and economic ties with Bhutan. The Indian military “is virtually responsible for protecting Bhutan from external and internal threats” and to this end, the Eastern Command of the Indian Army and Air Force have integrated Bhutan’s defence into their role and responsibilities.
- ▶▶ Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) trains Bhutanese security personnel as well.

