



EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

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Bhutan-China Relations and India's concerns

Syllabus: GS2/ India & Foreign Relations

In News

- The recent visit of Bhutan's Foreign Minister Tandi Dorji to China was unsettling for India.

Significance of Bhutan's recent meet in China

- The visit of Bhutan's Foreign Minister to China was unprecedented on several levels.
- Bhutan and China do not maintain **diplomatic relations**.
 - His visit is the first ever by a Bhutanese Foreign Minister.
- The main purpose was the **holding of boundary talks** that have not taken place in more than seven years.
 - According to a joint statement, both countries have signed a cooperation agreement outlining the functioning of a new **joint technical team** for the **delimitation** and **demarcation of the boundary**.

Bhutan-China border dispute

- **Background:**
 - China and Bhutan share about 477 kilometres of border.
 - The dispute over the boundary can be **traced back to 1950** when **China occupied Tibet** and **refused to recognise the dividing line** between **Tibet and Bhutan**.
 - Beijing also took over the **control of eight Bhutanese enclaves in Tibet** during its retaliatory action to the **Tibetan uprising in 1959**.
- **Boundary talks:**
 - Bhutan and China started **boundary talks in 1984** and have since focused on **mainly three disputed areas** —
 - Jakarlung and Pasamlung areas in north Bhutan, and
 - The Doklam area in west Bhutan.

Concerns of India

- **About:**

- India, given its special relationship with Bhutan, has been very wary about the possibility of the establishment of diplomatic relations and the signing of a boundary agreement.
- **Threat of swapping Doklam:**
 - There are concerns in India that a deal between Bhutan and China could include swapping Doklam – located close to the tri-junction between India, Bhutan and China – **for disputed territories in the north.**
- **Doklam holds great security importance for India:**
 - China’s control over the region could threaten the Siliguri Corridor, a 22km stretch connecting the Indian mainland to the Northeast.
 - Also known as Chicken’s Neck, the Siliguri Corridor links India with Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh.
- **Direct threat to India’s Eastern border:**
 - With Doklam under its control, China could exert more pressure on India; Chinese forces could easily sever India’s connection to the eastern part of their disputed border.



India China border dispute

- **About:**
 - Tensions remain high between India and China over the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
 - Despite several rounds of deliberations following **military clashes in 2020 in Ladakh’s Galwan Valley**, both sides have not been able to reach an agreement over the disengagement of troops at key friction points such as **Depsang and Demchok.**
- **China’s territorial claims:**
 - In late August, Beijing vexed New Delhi by releasing a “standard map” showing Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh within China’s border.
 - India rejected China’s territorial claims.

- **India-China Doklam stand-off**
 - In 2017, the Indian and Chinese troops were involved in an **intense standoff over Doklam** that **lasted two months** after China started constructing a road towards the strategically significant **Jampheri ridge line**.
 - India considers the Doklam plateau as an undisputed territory of Bhutan, whereas, **Beijing regards it as an extension of its Chumbi Valley**, which lies between Sikkim and Bhutan.
- **Claiming Bhutan's territories to pressurise India:**
 - In June 2020, Beijing asserted a claim on the **Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary**, which is situated in eastern Bhutan and borders Arunachal Pradesh.
 - China has also allegedly built several villages inside Bhutanese territory.
 - India believes China's claim over Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary is its way of putting pressure on Bhutan to hand over Doklam.

India's strategy to tackle its border disputes

- **Construction activities:** As part of the strategy to secure the borders and also to create infrastructure in the border areas of the country, several initiatives have been undertaken by the Border Management Division. **These include:**
 - Construction of **fence, floodlighting, roads, Border Out Posts (BOPs), Company Operating Bases (COBs)** and
 - **Deployment of technological solutions** along the India-Pakistan, India-Bangladesh, India-China, India-Nepal, India-Bhutan and India-Myanmar borders.
- **Other development projects:** Projects like the **Trans-Arunachal Highway** will help in mounting an effective and speedy response against aggression by China.
 - The **Border Roads Organisation (BRO)** completed more than 100 projects in border areas, the majority of which were close to the border with China.
 - India is speeding up work on the **Nimu-Padam-Darcha axis** which is going to help **troops move to Ladakh** from other parts of the country.
 - However, this will take time; until then we have to be prepared to deal with its aggression along LAC in an '**Armed Coexistence**' scenario.
- **Deployment of troops & surveillance:** The Indian Army and the BSF are deployed in multiple layers to form an **anti-infiltration grid**.
 - **The border fence and deployment of other surveillance devices** has helped in **reducing infiltrations**.
- **Along Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar borders:**

- Our borders with these countries are guarded primarily by paramilitary forces, and they have to deal with smuggling and trafficking of humans, drugs, arms, illegal migration and movement of suspected insurgents.
- Porous borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar and open borders with Nepal pose challenges in dealing with these nefarious activities.

Way ahead

- China has not settled its land border dispute with only two countries — India and Bhutan.
- China's increased urgency toward border talks with Bhutan should not be seen in isolation.
- Resolving the dispute over Doklam is inextricably linked to the conflict on China and India's shared border, and specifically to the status of Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims as an extension of South Tibet.
- A border deal that addresses Bhutanese concerns in the north while preserving India's red lines in the west is the need of an hour.

Daily Mains Question

[Q] Discuss the concerns of Bhutan-China Boundary talks for India. What is India's strategy to tackle its border disputes, especially in the eastern sector?