

# Indo-Bhutan relations

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## Manifest pedagogy

Bhutan has been in news for many reasons; one is issue of Doklam, second country of importance as part of neighborhood first policy. Questions may be generally related to policies or they may get tougher when specific sector is focused on like hydropower diplomacy in this case.

## In news

Bhutan PM Lotay Tshering visited India

## Placing it in syllabus

India's bilateral relations

## Static dimensions

1. Indo-Bhutan Historical relations
2. Indo-Bhutan Hydropower diplomacy

## Current dimensions

1. India's Neighborhood first policy
2. Indo-Bhutan relations under new Government in Bhutan

## Content

Diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan were established in 1968 with the establishment of a special office of India in Thimphu. Before this India's relations with Bhutan were looked after by a 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 India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty not only reflects the contemporary nature of our relationship but also lays the foundation for their future development in the 21st century. The Golden Jubilee of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan was celebrated in the year 2018.

## **Recent visit by new Prime Minister of Bhutan**

- This was Prime Minister Dr. Lotay Tshering's first overseas visit after assuming the office in November 2018. The visit took place during the Golden Jubilee year of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan
- The two Prime Ministers acknowledged the contribution of commemorative events organized in the Golden Jubilee year to strengthen the close bonds of friendship and understanding between the Governments of peoples of the two countries. In this regard, they recalled **the vision and guidance of the Druk Gyalpos of Bhutan and successive political leadership in India and Bhutan** in nurturing and enhancing close ties of friendship and cooperation between the two countries.
- Prime Minister Shri Modi stated that in line with Government of **India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy, India is firmly committed to partner Bhutan** in its quest for development and economic prosperity based on the priorities of the people and the Royal Government of Bhutan.
- The two sides **discussed the Government of India's development assistance package for Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan** for the period 1 November 2018 to 31 October 2023. PM Shri Modi conveyed that India will **provide grant assistance towards Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan, and a transitional Trade Support Facility** of INR 400 Crore over a period of five years to strengthen bilateral trade and economic linkages.

- The two sides also discussed Bhutan's priorities in the health sector.
- The two Prime Ministers **reviewed the implementation of ongoing bilateral hydro-power projects in Bhutan**, and agreed to expedite their implementation. They reiterated their commitment to jointly develop 10,000 MWs of hydropower generating capacity in Bhutan and in this regard discussed the **Sankosh Hydropower Project**.
- They welcomed the mutually beneficial understanding reached between the two sides on the tariff for the export of surplus power from **Mangdechhu project** in Bhutan to India.

## **Historical relations**

For much of its history, Bhutan has preserved its isolation from the outside world, staying out of international organisations and maintaining few bilateral relations. Bhutan became a protectorate of British India after signing a treaty in 1910 allowing the British to "guide" its foreign affairs and defence. **Bhutan was one of the first to recognise India's independence in 1947** and both nations fostered close relations, their importance augmented by the annexation of Tibet in 1950 by the People's Republic of China and its border disputes with both Bhutan and India, which saw close ties with Nepal and Bhutan to be central to its "Himalayan frontier" security policy.

## **India's assistance to Bhutan**

There are many programmes which are assisted by Government of India in order to maintain special relations with Bhutan, they are:

- School Reform Program, Upgradation of the East-West Highway and the Power Training Institute.
- Government of India provided financial assistance to Bhutan during its Eleventh Five Year Plan (2013-18),

even India announced that it would do for 12<sup>th</sup>

- **Military assistance**-A 2,000 strong Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) is permanently based in western Bhutan to train the Royal Bhutan Army, while other units regularly cooperate with the Royal Bhutan Army

## **Hydropower relations**

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. So far, Government of India has constructed three Hydroelectric Projects (HEPs) in Bhutan totaling 1416 MW (336 MW Chukha HEP, 60 MW Kurichhu HEP and 1020 MW Tala HEP), 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.

### **Projects under implementation through IG model**

1. **Punatsangchhu-I** HEP is a 1200 MW run-of-the river project located on the left bank of Punatsangchhu River in Wangdue Phodrang Dzongkhag (District) in Western Bhutan.
2. **Punatsangchhu-II** HEP is a 1020 MW run-of-the river project.
3. **Mangdechhu HEP** is a 720 MW, run-of-the river scheme located on river Mangdechhu in Trongsa Dzongkhag (District) in Central Bhutan.

### **Doklam incident- Causes, India's role and its impact on the relationship**

Doklam is an area disputed between China and Bhutan located near their tri-junction with India. Unlike China and Bhutan, India does not claim Doklam but supports Bhutan's claim.

#### **Causes**

- It flared up in 2017 when the Chinese were trying to **construct a road in the area**, and Indian troops, in aid of their Bhutanese counterparts, objected to it, resulting in the stand-off.
- The faceoff was triggered when a team of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was prevented by Indian troops from extending a class-5 track in the Dolam Plateau area which is part of Bhutanese territory.
- **Doklam is strategically located close to the Siliguri Corridor**, which connects mainland India with its north-eastern region. The corridor, also called Chicken's Neck, is a vulnerable point for India.

**India's role-** Indian border units crossed a demarcated section of the border in the Sikkim sector and pushed the Chinese out of the disputed area in the course of a brief unarmed incident (both sides used wrestling techniques). The project was suspended. **The Indian Army acted in response to a request from the Royal Bhutan Army under the terms of the 2007 Bilateral Friendship Treaty.**

**Doklam incident would strengthen relations between India and Bhutan, with this it has proved that India maintains its neighborhood first policy.**

## **Test yourself: Mould your thought**

Critically examine the causes of Doklam incident. Analyze India's response to and discuss its implications on Indo-Bhutan relations