

Kailash Manasarovar Yatra

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Manifest pedagogy: India and neighborhood relations is a hot topic for UPSC. The natural landscapes involved, interests of the nations concerned, diplomatic ties which they are engaged in all needs to be studied.

In news: The Defence Minister recently inaugurated a road route through Uttarakhand to reach Kailash Mansarovar.

Placing it in syllabus: India and neighbors

Static dimensions: Kailash Manasarovar

Current dimensions:

- About new route
- Strategic importance of the road
- Why is Nepal objecting it?

Content:

Kailash Mansarovar:

- **Mount Kailash** is a 6,638 m high peak in the Kailash Range, which **forms part of the Trans-Himalaya** in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.
- The mountain is **located near Lake Manasarovar and Lake Rakshastal**.
- It is close to the source of rivers Indus, Sutlej, Brahmaputra, Karnali also known as Ghaghara (a tributary of the Ganges) in India.
- Mount Kailash is considered to be **sacred in four religions: Bon, Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism**.
- In 2019, 'Sacred Mountain Landscape and Heritage Routes' (Indian side of Kailash Mansarovar) has been proposed

for inclusion in Tentative List of World Heritage Sites of India, under the Mixed site category.

- The Kailash-Mansarovar road alignment is **along the Kali river, which is the boundary between India and Nepal.**
- The pilgrimage to Kailash and to the Mansarover lake is run exclusively by **Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN), a government organization,** which works in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs of GOI and the Government of China.

About new route:

- In a video conference, the Defence Minister recently inaugurated a **new 80-km road in Uttarakhand connecting the Line of Actual Control (LAC).**
- It has led to the opening of a new route for Kailash Mansarovar yatra, where the link **road connects Dharchula,** a town in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh to **Lipulekh Pass (China border).**



- Lipulekh Pass also known as Lipu-Lekh Pass/Qiangla or Tri-Corner is a high altitude mountain pass situated in the western Himalayas.
- It is an **International mountain pass between India, China and Nepal.**
- The new road is scheduled **to be completed by December 2022.**
- The Link Road is named as the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra Route and **Border Roads Organisation (BRO) is carrying out the project.**

Strategic importance of the new road:

- Pilgrims from India can reach Kailash Mansarovar through three routes, via Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Kathmandu in Nepal – all of which are long and arduous.
- The **route via Uttarakhand involves three stretches–**

The first stretch is **from Pithoragarh to Tawaghat**, the second is from **Tawaghat to Ghatiabgarh** and the third stretch is the 80 kms from **Ghatiabgarh to Lipulekh Pass at the China border**, which can only be traversed on foot. This stretch till the India-China pass takes five days to cover.

- The BRO is converting the second stretch into a double lane road, and is building a new road on the third stretch to allow vehicles.
- It has so far completed 76 km of the 80-km stretch and the last 4 km of road till Lipulekh Pass is expected to be completed by year end.
- The new road will **significantly reduce the travel time** for pilgrims (**just two days by a vehicle**).
- It is just a fifth of the distance when compared to other routes.
- It **ensures that the majority of the travel is in India (84 per cent)** as compared to other routes where 80 percent of the road travel is through China.
- The Ghatiabgarh-Lipulekh road was first **approved by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)** in 2005 and revised in 2018 where CCS set December 2022 as the deadline.

Why is Nepal objecting it?

- **Nepal claims that the Lipulekh pass comes under its territory** and lies in the **Dharchula district in Sudurpaschim Pradesh**.
- It is marked by the Kalapani river, one of the headwaters of the Kali River in the Himalayas.
- Nepal has blamed that this unilateral act by India **runs against the understanding reached between the two countries at the level of Prime Ministers in 2014** (between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and (then) Nepal PM Sushil Koirala) that a solution to boundary issues would be sought through negotiation.
- However, **according to India, the headwaters of the river are not included in the boundary**.

- India has always considered Lipulekh as a tri-junction with the territory to the east of the pass as the Nepalese territory.
- Lipulekh has always been on the Indian map and Nepal hasn't protested until now.
- **China has also accepted that it belongs to India** and hence it is allowing it as a route to Tibet.

((Note: India had closed Lipulekh from 1962 to 1991 due to the 1962 Sino-Indian war. The **locals, Byansis of Kumaon**, then used the **Tinkar Pass** for all their trade with Tibet)).

Mould your thought: Explain the strategic importance of the Kailash-Mansarovar route. Why is Nepal opposing the new road being built by India?