

India-Bhutan Relations

India Bhutan Relations is traditionally close as both countries share a special relationship based on culture and mutual interests. India remains influential over Bhutan's foreign policy, defence and commerce.

India-Bhutan relations are important in the international relations segment of the UPSC Mains Exam

History of India Bhutan Relations

Bhutan for much its history has preserved its sovereignty by being isolated from world events thanks to its mountainous geography. The first bilateral relation it established was in 1910 when it signed a treaty with the British Empire, allowing it to 'guide' its foreign affairs and defence. When India became independent in 1947, Bhutan was one of the first to recognise it. Both the nations fostered close ties from then on.

Bhutan and India signed a Treaty of Friendship on August 8, 1949, calling for the two nations and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. The treaty also established free trade and extradition protocols. The treaty made Bhutan a protected state not a protectorate as it still has the power to conduct its own independent foreign policy

China's annexation of Tibet brought the nation even closer, as India saw the relation with Nepal and Bhutan as the key to its 'Himalayan Frontier' security policy. In 1958 Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (born on November 14, 1889) visited Bhutan and reiterated support for Bhutan's independence and later declared that any aggression against Bhutan would be seen as an act of war by India

The '50s saw a significant increase in India's economic, military and development aid to Bhutan, which started on a programme to modernise its military. In spite of the good relations, India and Bhutan only completed demarcation talks between 1973 and 1984.

Border demarcation talks with India generally resolved disagreements except for several small sectors, including the middle zone between Sarpang and Geylegphug and the eastern frontier with the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

In 2007 India re-negotiated the 1949 Friendship Treaty. The new treaty replaced the provision requiring Bhutan to take India's guidance on foreign policy and not requiring India's permission to obtain arms.

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The present Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose Bhutan as his first foreign destination, placing regional co-operation before global co-operation. He had inaugurated the Supreme Court Complex in Bhutan and also promised help to Bhutan on the IT and digital sectors.

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India-Bhutan Commercial and Military Relations

In the 2012-2013 financial year, India's budgetary contribution to Bhutan stood around at INR 30 billion. It steadily rose over the years to reach INR 61.60 billion in 2015-2016 financial year. Making Bhutan the largest beneficiary to India's aid.

India operates 3 hydropower projects, of 1,416 MW in Bhutan and 3 more of 2,129 MW are under construction. The third Prime Minister of Bhutan Lotay Tshering secured an aid package of about \$635 million for the 12th five-year plan in his first overseas visit to India in November 2018.

India allows 16 entry and exit points for Bhutanese trade with other nations except for China and made an agreement with Bhutan to develop and import a minimum of 10,000 megawatts of electricity by 2021.

In military relations, a 2000 strong Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) is permanently based in western Bhutan. Other units of the Indian Army also closely cooperate with the Royal Bhutan Army in matters of anti-insurgency and counter-terrorism.

The Royal Bhutanese Army does not have a navy as it is the landlocked country a neither does it have an Air Force. Its air protection is provided by the Eastern Air Command of the Indian Air Force.

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