

AIR Spotlight - PM Modi's Visit to Lumbini

AIR Spotlight is an insightful program featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panellists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, the Prime Minister's Nepal visit and the significance of the relations between India and Nepal are discussed.

Participants:

1. Rakesh Sood, Former Diplomat
2. Simran Sodi, Journalist

Context: The Prime Minister of India visited Lumbini in Nepal on the occasion of Vaishakha Buddha Purnima.

Important Highlights of the visit:

- The visit by the Indian Prime Minister to Nepal has conveyed a positive message of the revival of India-Nepal friendship.
- [The India-Nepal](#) relationship has been time-tested but has experienced tensions, especially with respect to land boundary disputes.
- The Indian Prime Minister's visit has been witnessed on an occasion that holds enormous cultural significance.
- It is regarded by many that the Prime Minister's visit is an attempt by India to strengthen its neighbourhood relationship by promoting cultural diplomacy.

Cultural Importance of Lumbini:

- It highlights the strong cultural ties between the two countries that share a special relationship which was nurtured by the Treaty of Peace and Friendship signed in 1950.
- Lumbini is believed to be a holy place and according to Buddhist tradition, Queen Mahamaya Devi gave birth to Siddhartha Gautama at around 623 B.C. there.
- It is believed that [Lord Buddha](#) was born in the gardens of Lumbini which transformed into a place of pilgrimage.
- Lumbini is recognised as the holiest and most important place in Nepal and it is listed as a World Heritage site by [UNESCO](#).
- The visit took place at an eventful time of Vaishakha Buddha Purnima at Lumbini which was organised by the Lumbini Development Trust under the aegis of the Government of Nepal.
- In the light of art and culture, [Buddhism](#) has been an integral part of India's cultural heritage and a prominent thread of its diplomatic relationship with Nepal. Lumbini acts as the testimony to such a cultural bond.

- The construction of the Centre for Buddhist Culture and Heritage will be undertaken by the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) in association with Lumbini Development Trust and will be financed by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. The IBC is a grantee body under the Ministry of Culture, GoI.
- IBC is headquartered in New Delhi and was established in 2013 acting as an International Buddhist umbrella body serving as a common platform for Buddhists worldwide.
- Lumbini will house the symbolic Buddhist centre reflecting the enriching friendship between India and Nepal and the centre will be the first **Net Zero Emission** building in Nepal. It is a moment of essence for India to be at the forefront of such an initiative.

Challenges of India-Nepal Relationship:

- The transformation of the Indian economy has, to some extent, complicated the documentation related to trade across the Indo-Nepal border adding to the difficulties in the movement of goods and services with difficult payment transaction procedures. This has created an easy passage for the small and medium businesses of Nepal to trade with China.
- There has been a considerable decline in the Indian investments in Nepal.
- The socio-economic network between the two countries has failed to adapt to the changing needs of the time.

The Border strain:

- A series of territorial disputes have flared up building tension between the two close neighbours.
- The Lipulekh dispute between India and Nepal ignited a hostile situation in May 2015. Nepal opposed the agreement between India and China to develop transit and trade through the Lipulekh region and called this act a violation of Nepal's territorial integrity.



Image source: The Times of India

- The tensions furthered when the Government of India issued a new political map in 2019 including the disputed territories within the international borders of India. This created a sense of anti-India nationalism throughout Nepal.
- In order to include the disputed areas, the Nepali government amended its constitution. As a result, India imposed an unofficial economic blockade on Nepal and this contributed to the worsening of relations between the two countries.

Ways Ahead:

- The unresolved territorial disputes between India and Nepal need to be addressed through diplomatic interventions.
- The two neighbouring countries have withstood profound tensions without letting them impact the predominant trade relationship. India must put more effort to expand its trade and investments in Nepal with a multidimensional approach.
- Both the countries should engage in discussions to properly demarcate the Kalapani border, especially the 'no-man's land' in the area.
- The long term risk of an emerging anti-Indian nationalism remains a prominent concern which needs an effective intervention to retain friendly and peaceful diplomatic relations between India and Nepal.
- The cultural route can be further enriched by increasing high-level visits like the visit by the Indian Prime Minister to Lumbini on Buddha Purnima.

- It is suggested that the border dispute between India and Nepal must be resolved on the basis of the Sugauli Treaty of 1816 which asserted that the Mahakali river that runs through the Kalapani area, demarcates the boundaries between India and Nepal.

Read more about Sugauli Treaty in [CNA](#) dated 23 May 2020.

- A strong cultural Buddhist network will embolden the friendship between the two close neighbours.
- Therefore, PM Modi's visit to Nepal has been welcomed as successful deployment of India's soft power to refurbish bilateral ties.

Note:-

What is a no-man's land?

- It is a particular area between two countries which remains uninhabited.
 - India and Nepal possess such a space which lies 16 meters south of the Nepal-India border pillar.
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