

AIR Discussions (December 3rd Week)

AIR SPOTLIGHT: HIGHEST CIVILIAN AWARD OF BHUTAN CONFERRED TO PM MODI

Context:

- **Bhutan confers its highest civilian award on PM Narendra Modi.**
- Bhutan highlighted the 'unconditional friendship' that India had extended over the years, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic
- **Bhutan was, in fact, the first country to receive Covid-19 vaccines**, manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII) from India as a gift.

Background of relations:

- India and Bhutan share unique and exemplary bilateral relations, which are based on mutual trust, goodwill and understanding. **Formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan were established in 1968.**
- The basic framework of India-Bhutan relations is the **Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1949** between the two countries, which was renewed in February 2007.
- The bilateral ties have been advanced by **regular high-level exchanges** between the two countries.
- **Trade and Economic Ties:**
 - **India is Bhutan's largest trading partner.**
 - In 2020, bilateral trade accounted for 82.6% of Bhutan's total trade.
 - **Imports from India accounting for more than 77.1% of Bhutan's total imports.**
 - **Bhutan's exports to India constituted 90.2 % of its total exports.**
 - The revised **Bilateral Agreement on Trade, Commerce and Transit between India and Bhutan** came into effect in 2017, and would be valid for ten years.
 - In line with our 'Neighbourhood First Policy', new market access has been opened for five agri-commodities from Bhutan to India (Areca nut, Mandarin, Apple, Potato, and Ginger), and three commodities from India to Bhutan (Tomato, Onion, and Okra).
- **Development Partnership:**
 - India has been **extending economic assistance to Bhutan's socio-economic development since the early 1960s when Bhutan launched its Five Year Plans.**
 - **India continues to be the principal development partner of Bhutan.**
 - For the 12th Five Year Plan, India's contribution of Rs. 4500 cr. will constitute 73% of Bhutan's total external grant component.
 - At present over 82 large and intermediate projects and 524 Small Development Projects/HICDPs are at various stages of implementation in Bhutan.
- **Hydropower Cooperation:**
 - The ongoing cooperation between India and Bhutan in the hydropower sector is covered under the **2006 bilateral agreement for cooperation and its Protocol signed in 2009.**
 - **Four hydro-electric projects (HEPs) totaling 2136 MW are already operational in Bhutan and are supplying electricity to India.**

- The 720 MW Mangdechhu, 1200 MW Punatsangchhu-I, 1020 MW Punatsangchhu-II in Inter-Governmental mode are under various stages of implementation.
- The Concession Agreement for the first Joint Venture Hydro Electric Power Project, 600 MW Kholongchhu, was signed in 2020
- **Educational, Cultural Cooperation and People-to-People Exchanges:**
 - Over 950 scholarships are being provided annually by GoI for Bhutanese students to study in India in a wide range of disciplines including medicine, engineering, etc.
 - It is estimated that approximately 4,000 Bhutanese are studying in undergraduate courses in Indian Universities on self-finance basis.
 - Under the ITEC program, about 300 slots have been utilized annually by Bhutan for upgrading administrative and technical skills of government officials and private sector employees in Bhutan.
- **Cultural and Buddhist Links:** A number of Bhutanese pilgrims travel to Bodh Gaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, Sikkim, Udayagiri, and other Buddhist sites in India.
- **New Areas of Cooperation:**
 - Apart from hydro-power cooperation and development partnership has moved into new and emerging areas with **full interoperability of the flagship digital project RuPay**, which has been successfully completed.
 - **Bhutan became the second country to launch the BHIM app**, further deepening the financial linkages between our two countries.
 - **Space cooperation** has continued with the two countries collaborating on the development of a small satellite for Bhutan.
- **COVID-19 Assistance:** In line with India-Bhutan unique and special relations, GoI ensured continuous supply of trade and essential items to Bhutan, despite COVID-19 related lock-downs.
- **Indian Community:** About 60,000 Indian nationals live in Bhutan, employed mostly in the hydro-electric power construction and road industry.
- **Multilateral Partnership:** Both India and Bhutan are founding members of SAARC that deals with economic, social and cultural development of South Asian Region. Both of them also share other multilateral forums such as BBIN, BIMSTEC etc.

Bhutan's Significance to India:

- Bhutan **shares border with four Indian States:** Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal and Sikkim.
- Nestled in the Himalayas, Bhutan **serves as a buffer between India and China.**
- Security of Bhutan's present borders especially its western border is very important for India.
- Bhutan **provides a market for Indian commodities and is a destination for Indian investment.**
- Also for India, Bhutan is **a rich source of hydropower.**
- A politically stable Bhutan is important to India. **An unstable and restive Bhutan can provide a safe haven to anti-India activities and anti-India militant groups.**

Challenges:

- There have been instances when **India has meddled in Bhutan's internal affairs. This has led to negative perception of India in the minds of Bhutanese.**
- There is a **growing feeling in Bhutan that India's development of Bhutan's hydropower production is driven by self-interest** as it is getting Bhutan's surplus power at relatively cheap rates.

- From internal security perspective, **illicit establishment of camps by militant outfits in the dense jungles of south-east Bhutan is a cause of concern for both the nations.**
- **China's continuous claims to important border areas such as Chumbi valley and Doklam and its continuous efforts for establishing strong diplomatic and economic relations with Bhutan** have been continuous source of concern for India.

Way Forward:

- India needs to **step up efforts to publicize the benefits that accrue to Bhutan from Indian projects.**
- India continuously needs to **explore new areas of cooperation with Bhutan.**
- India **should try as much as possible to remain out of Bhutan's internal matters**, though it can act as a mentor.
- **Safety of Border from China is a concern for both nations.** Therefore, both sides need to work together on this issue.
- Being neighbours, it is necessary that **both nations continuously recognise value of each other.** For this, regular high level visits from both the sides are necessary.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/bhutan-confers-its-highest-civilian-award-on-pm-narendra-modi-101639716774847.html>

<https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Bhutan-2021.pdf>

PRELIMS SPECIAL: NEWS IN BRIEF

Green Hydrogen Microgrid Project

- India's **first and world's largest Green Hydrogen Microgrid Project** will be set up at **Simhadri near Visakhapatnam** by the National Thermal Power Corporation Limited.
- This is considered to be the **precursor for large scale hydrogen energy storage**.
- This hydrogen energy storage project will employ electrolyzers for the production of hydrogen energy along with the deployment of multiple microgrids at various strategic locations of the country.
- **Microgrids are a group of energy sources that are found in solar panels, wind turbines and combined heat and power generators.**
- Hydrogen will be produced using advanced 240 kW solid oxide fuel cells which would obtain input power from nearby solar projects.
- The project will ensure decarbonisation of the regions of Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir which are dependent on diesel generators making the region carbon neutral.

<https://newsonair.com/2021/12/15/india-to-soon-give-to-the-world-largest-green-hydrogen-microgrid-project/>

The State of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

- **Report on the State of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India** has been released by the **Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC - PM)**.
- The report is **prepared by the Institute for Competitiveness** and it addresses the importance of early education in the overall development of a child.
- It assesses the role of policy interventions like the National Education Policy 2020 and the NIPUN Bharat Programme in the improvement of learning outcomes.
- **Kerala has performed well in terms of learning outcomes in the small states category.**
- However **Andhra Pradesh has outperformed Kerala in terms of accessibility to education.**
- **West Bengal topped the list in the category of large states and Lakshadweep topped in the Union Territory category and Mizoram became the top scoring region in the Northeast category.**
- Some states exhibited poor performance in terms of Governance and over half of the states have a score below the national average (28.05).
- The North eastern states have performed considerably well.
- Access to education needs a prompt action as the performance of larger states like Rajasthan, Gujarat and Bihar is significantly poor.

<https://newsonair.gov.in/News?title=Economic-Advisory-Council-releases-report-on-State-of-Foundational-Literacy-and-Numeracy%3B-ask-States-to-learn-from-high-performer-states&id=431660>

'Agni P' Ballistic Missile

- DRDO has successfully tested the new generation nuclear capable ballistic missile Agni P from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam island off the coast of Odisha.
- **Agni - P is a variant of the Agni class of missiles which consists of two-staged canisterised missiles that offer solid propellant ballistic missiles with dual redundant navigation and guidance systems.**
- **The missile range capability is between 1000 and 2000 km**
- The missile trajectory and parameters were monitored by telemetry, radar, electro- optical stations and downrange ships.
- It was observed that the trajectory met all mission objectives with greater accuracy.
- This new generation Agni - P missile is **nuclear capable**

<https://newsonair.com/2021/12/18/india-successfully-test-fired-new-generation-ballistic-missile-agni-p/>

