General Studies-2; Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations

India - Bhutan Relations

1) **Introduction**
   - Diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan were established in 1968 with the appointment of a resident representative of India in Thimphu.
   - The basic framework of India-Bhutan bilateral relations is the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1949 which was revised in February 2007.
   - The Doklam impasse saw a more confident and resolute relationship emerge between India and Bhutan.

2) **Why Bhutan is special to India**
   - Bhutan was the first country to be visited by Prime Minister Narendra after assuming office.
   - The unique relations between India and Bhutan are characterized by deep understanding and mutual trust.
   - Bhutan has special ties with India and is closer to New Delhi
   - 2018 will be the 50th year of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries
   - The support Bhutan provides to India at various international forums, including the UN
   - Bhutan along with India has not joined China’s One Belt One Road (OBOR) summit.

3) **Bilateral Relations**
   - There are a number of institutional mechanisms in areas such as security, border management, trade, transit, economic, hydro-power, and water resources.
   - Hydropower projects in Bhutan are an example of win-win cooperation, providing clean electricity to India and generating export revenue for Bhutan.
   - India is both the financier and sole buyer of the electricity that will be generated.
   - India is Bhutan's largest trading partner.
   - There is a Secretary-level mechanism on border management and security related matters
   - There is a Joint Group of Experts (JGE) on flood management between India and Bhutan to recommend appropriate measures to both Governments.
   - A large number of Bhutanese students are studying in India.
   - India is Bhutan’s largest aid donor in its five-year plans.

4) **Defence Relations**
   - The Doklam standoff highlighted New Delhi’s defence commitment towards Bhutan.
   - Indian troops stationed in Bhutan under a special security arrangement intervened to keep Chinese troops at bay.
   - Under the 2007 India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty, the two sides agreed to cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests.
   - Neither Government shall allow the use of its territory for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other.
   - The Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT), plays a critical role in training Bhutanese security personnel.
5) **What is bothering China?**
- Though Bhutan stands to gain more disputed territory and also solve the border issue with China, it has not done so from 1984 onwards, so as to protect India’s security interests.
- Bhutan will be more dependent on India because India is the sole buyer of its hydroelectric resources.
- If all the hydroelectricity projects come on stream in the next 15 years, Bhutan will actually become quite rich like a petroleum exporting country.
- Bhutan does not have diplomatic ties with China, something Beijing has been trying to rectify in the past few years.

6) **Concerns / Challenges**
- The impression among some Bhutanese people is that India comes in the way of Bhutan as an independent state, especially in the foreign policy arena.
- They feel that India has prevented them from normalising diplomatic ties and negotiating a border settlement with China.
- The next election in Bhutan in October 2018 could well be fought on pro- and anti-India slogans.
- Bhutan’s trade deficit is set to worsen as India’s GST makes its exports to Bhutan cheaper and imports from Bhutan more expensive.
- India’s plan for regional connectivity seems to have hit with Bhutan unable to get the parliamentary ratification to implement the BBIN project.
- All these concerns and anxieties need to be recognised, respected and addressed appropriately.

7) **Way Forward**
- India must be careful not to seem bossy, and end up souring up its relationship with Bhutan as was done in the case of Nepal.
- The Doklam crisis can be taken as a wake-up call and be used as an opportunity rather than as a continuing threat with China.
- Much more active and closer contact with the Bhutanese King needs to be maintained.
- Steps should be taken to invite him for some national, regional or cultural events so that close and strong relations between the two countries could be sustained.
- India needs to give more attention in inviting Bhutanese youth to study in India at all levels.
- Media, particularly social media, needs to be harnessed to reach out to Bhutanese policymakers and common people to give them the confidence that India will stand by them for their economic and cultural development.

8) **Conclusion**
- India should further cement its ties with Bhutan by paying more attention to it so that China is not able to drive a wedge between the two.