

China - Bhutan Border Dispute

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Why in news?

- The 11th Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the China-Bhutan Boundary Issues was held in China's Kunming city.
- After the meeting, both sides announced that a positive consensus has been reached to push forward the implementation of all steps of the Three Step-Roadmap.

What is China - Bhutan Border Dispute?

Image caption: China-Bhutan Disputes Areas

- Bhutan shares a 477 km-long border with China, which claims certain territories from Bhutan:
 - **In the north** – Pasamlung and Jakarlung valleys; and
 - Both of these places are culturally vital for Bhutan.
 - **In the west** – Doklam, Dramana, and Shakhatoe, Yak Chu and Charithang Chu, and Sinchulungpa and Langmarpo valleys.
 - These places are pasture-rich and strategically located in the Bhutan-India-China trijunction, lying precariously close to India's Siliguri Corridor.
- In 2020, China made new claims on Bhutan's East in the Sakteng sanctuary.
 - Surprisingly, there has been no mention of Eastern Bhutan in the previous rounds of boundary negotiations held between the two countries.
 - Hence, addition of Eastern Bhutan in the list of disputed territories has baffled Bhutan.
 - This eastern sector of Bhutan has a large Bhutanese population, traditional Dzongs (Medieval Fortresses) and two Bhutanese districts since time immemorial.

Boundary Negotiation between Bhutan and China

- Although, Bhutan does not have a formal diplomatic relation with China, the country began its first border negotiations with China in 1984.
- To date, both countries have held 11 expert group meetings and 24 rounds of border negotiations.
- In October 2021, Bhutan and China signed an MoU on the Three-Step Roadmap for Expediting the China-Bhutan Boundary Negotiations.
 - The three-step roadmap has still not been made public.

Why India is keeping an eye on the developments related to China-Bhutan boundary dispute?

- India views Chinese presence near Doklam as a major security concern close to the strategic Siliguri corridor.
- China has also staked claim to a wildlife sanctuary in Bhutan near the border with Arunachal.
- This assumes significance as, in December 2022, Indian and Chinese army troops clashed along the LAC in the Tawang Sector of Arunachal Pradesh.

What are the challenges in solving the border dispute between China and Bhutan?

Bhutan-China border dispute is not a bilateral issue

- The first challenge is to see if China would be keen on discussing the trijunction areas with India.
- For this, China will to shun its decades-old policy of treating the Bhutan-China border dispute as a bilateral issue and involve India as well.

Increasing Chinese expansion in the Western disputed regions

- India has briefed and sensitised Bhutan of China's increasing inroads on multiple occasions.
- Bhutan lacks the material capability and presence to avert these continuing intrusions.
- Despite this, it stays reluctant to seek more Indian assistance, fearing more Chinese assertiveness.

China is keen on establishing diplomatic relations with Bhutan

- China's solution to border disputes has often been inclusive of establishing diplomatic relations with Bhutan.
- Such demands from Beijing will only intensify as its tensions with the US and India increase.

Q1) Which countries share boundary with Bhutan?

Bhutan shares its borders with only two countries i.e. India and China. Bhutan, being a landlocked country does not maintain any maritime boundaries.

Q2) Which Indian States share boundary with Bhutan?

Bhutan shares borders with the Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh in its east, Sikkim in the west and Assam and West Bengal in the south.

Source: [China, Bhutan agree to move forward on roadmap for their boundary talks](#) | [ORF](#) | [Foreign Policy](#)

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