



TATHASTU
Institute of Civil Services

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS



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53/1, Upper Ground Floor, BadaBazar Road, Old Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi -110060

www.tathastuics.com

9560300770, 9560300554

enquiry@tathastuics.com



S.NO.	TOPIC
1.	INDIA-BHUTAN RELATION
2.	THE LEGALITY OF USING WHITE PHOSPHORUS

INDIA-BHUTAN RELATION

SOURCE: [THE HINDU](#)

WHY IN NEWS?

- The **25th round of boundary talks between Bhutan and China occurred**. These talks were significant as the previous round had taken place in 2016, marking a delay. This was **first official visit to China by the Bhutanese foreign minister** and **holding the long-pending talks indicated that that the substantive progress** had been made by the expert groups of official from both countries.

OVERVIEW OF BHUTAN-CHINA RELATIONS:

- **Normalizing Relations with China:**
 - ✓ Bhutan's efforts to **engage with China and conduct boundary talks** are aimed at normalizing relations.
- **Resolution of Boundary Issues:**
 - ✓ The talks with China focus on **resolving longstanding boundary issues**.
 - ✓ Bhutan is interested in settling these matters peacefully and securing its territorial integrity.
- **Economic and Geopolitical Factors:**
 - ✓ Bhutan's efforts **to develop economic ties with China** and other countries are also a driving force.
 - ✓ **Economic interests and geopolitical considerations** play a significant role in shaping Bhutan's foreign policy.
- **India's Concerns and Involvement:**
 - ✓ The **unique relationship between Bhutan and India is a key factor**.
 - ✓ India's interests and concerns regarding Bhutan's relations with China and **Bhutan likely consulted with India to ensure alignment** with its strategic partner.
- **Enhancing Regional Stability:**
 - ✓ By establishing diplomatic relations and resolving border issues with China, Bhutan **aims to enhance regional stability and cooperation, contributing to peace** in the region.
- **Border Security:**
 - ✓ It also includes the **need to address border security issues** and potential territorial swaps to reduce border-related tensions.
- **Preventing Future Crises:**
 - ✓ The **lessons learned from the 2017 Doklam standoff highlight the importance** of addressing Bhutan's concerns and aligning strategies to prevent future crises.
 - ✓ This is a driving factor for both Bhutan and India.





➤ **International Diplomacy:**

- ✓ As part of its broader foreign policy objectives, Bhutan's approach is driven by the desire to engage with China and other countries through diplomacy and negotiations.

INDIA-BHUTAN RELATIONS OVERVIEW:

➤ **Historical Framework:**

- ✓ India and Bhutan established formal diplomatic relations in 1968, with the foundation of their bilateral relationship being the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1949 (renewed in 2007).

➤ **High-Level Diplomatic Engagements:**

- ✓ **Bilateral Visits:** High-level visits between India and Bhutan have strengthened their relations. Examples include **Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bhutan in 2019** and various exchanges between the leaders of both countries.



➤ **Trade and Economic Cooperation:**

- ✓ **Trade Agreement:** The India-Bhutan Agreement on Trade, Commerce, and Transit fosters a free trade regime, with India being Bhutan's top trade partner. **India's merchandise trade with Bhutan has nearly tripled since 2014, reaching USD 1.4 billion in 2021-22**, constituting approximately 80% of Bhutan's total trade, with India maintaining a trade surplus.

➤ **Development Partnership:**

- ✓ **Economic Assistance:** India has supported Bhutan's socio-economic development since the 1960s. At present over **82 large and intermediate projects (projects under Project Tied Assistance) and 524 Small Development Projects/ HICDPs** are at various stages of implementation in Bhutan. The **4th India-Bhutan Development Cooperation Talks under the 12th FYP** were held in **January 2023**, during the visit of FS to Bhutan.

➤ **Hydropower Collaboration:**

- ✓ **Key Economic Pillar:** Mutually beneficial hydro-power cooperation with Bhutan is a key pillar of bilateral economic cooperation. **Four hydro-electric projects (HEPs) total 2136 MW are already operational in Bhutan** and are supplying electricity to India. **The 720 MW Mangdechhu was commissioned in August 2019 and handed over to Bhutan in December 2022**





- **Educational and Cultural Ties:**
 - ✓ **Educational Exchanges:** India offers numerous scholarships to **Bhutanese students**, strengthening educational and cultural connections. Several **Bhutanese student study in Indian** universities in various disciplines.
- **Cultural and Buddhist Relations:**
 - ✓ **Cultural and Religious Ties:** **Bhutanese pilgrims travel to various religious sites in India**, and cultural exchanges are facilitated. India and Bhutan have cooperated on the construction of Buddhist temples and other cultural activities.
- **Emerging Areas of Cooperation:**
 - ✓ **Digital Projects:** New areas of collaboration include **digital projects such as RuPay and BHIM app**, enhancing financial linkages. Space cooperation is also developing with joint satellite projects. The **India-Bhutan SAT was launched into space on 26 November 2022 by ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)**. Inauguration of Ground Earth Station during visit of Chairman, ISRO also took place in March 2023.
- **COVID-19 Assistance:**
 - ✓ **Support During Pandemic:** India provided essential medical supplies to Bhutan during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Vaccine Maitri Initiative led to the gifting of vaccines to Bhutan, enabling mass vaccination.
- **Indian Workforce in Bhutan:**
 - ✓ **Economic Interdependence:** About 50,000 Indian citizens work in Bhutan, contributing to the country's economy and infrastructure projects.
- **Multilateral Partnership:**
 - ✓ Both of them **share multilateral forums** such as South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (**SAARC**), **BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal)**, **BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)** etc.



CONCERNS IN INDIA REGARDING RECENT CHINA-BHUTAN DEVELOPMENTS:

- **Strategic Implications for India:**
 - ✓ Recent developments in China-Bhutan relations have **raised concerns about India's strategic interests**, particularly in the **Doklam tri-junction, where India, Bhutan, and China share a border**.
- **Revived Chinese Claim on Bhutan's Eastern Region:**
 - ✓ China has reasserted its **claim to Bhutan's eastern area, Sakteng**, situated alongside India's **Arunachal Pradesh**.
 - ✓ China has long considered **Arunachal Pradesh as part of its territory**, referred to as "**South Tibet**."

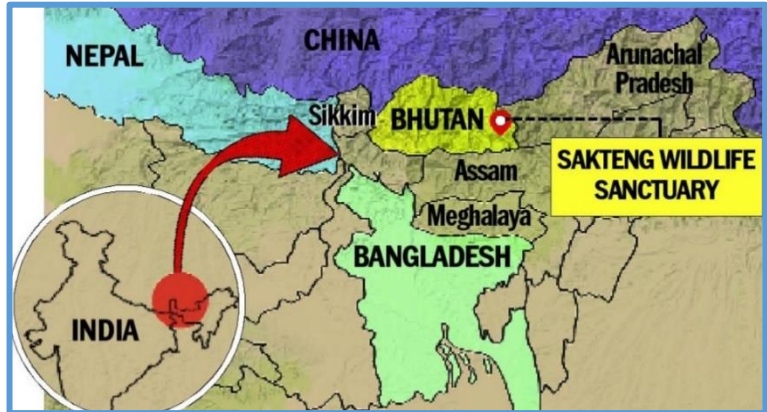




- ✓ China's claims on Sakteng may be viewed as a tactic to exert pressure on Bhutan, potentially influencing its stance on the boundary matter and challenging India's sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh.

➤ Shifting Dynamics in the Region:

- ✓ Bhutan has historically been a close ally of India, receiving economic and military support.
- ✓ However, China's increasing economic and diplomatic engagement with Bhutan in recent years could potentially diminish India's influence in the region, raising concerns about changing regional dynamics.



WAY FORWARD:

➤ Boosting Economic Collaboration:

- ✓ India and Bhutan can enhance economic ties by promoting bilateral trade, investments, and sharing technical expertise in key sectors like infrastructure, tourism, and hydropower.

➤ Addressing Chinese Concerns:

- ✓ India should work on alleviating China's worries about its regional role through transparent and open dialogues with Bhutan and neighboring nations.

➤ Peaceful Boundary Resolution:

- ✓ India and Bhutan should focus on peacefully resolving their border disputes, fostering a trusting and harmonious border relationship.

➤ Multilateral Engagement:

- ✓ India can engage in constructive dialogues with China through multilateral platforms like BRICS and SCO, facilitating mutually agreeable solutions for regional issues.

➤ Improved Connectivity:

- ✓ India can help Bhutan improve its transportation networks, including roads and railways, to boost trade and tourism as Bhutan is one of the buffer countries.

➤ Enhanced Defense Cooperation:

- ✓ India and Bhutan can strengthen defense ties by increasing joint military exercises and training, enhancing Bhutan's defense capabilities.

➤ Environmental Partnership:

- ✓ India and Bhutan can collaborate on environmental issues, sharing knowledge and expertise in sustainable development, climate change, and disaster management.

➤ Cultural Exchanges:

- ✓ Promoting exchanges of students, academics, and cultural groups between India and Bhutan will foster mutual understanding and strengthen people-to-people connections.

#IndiaBhutan

Development Partnership

- India has been extending economic assistance to Bhutan's socio-economic development since early 1960s
- Govt has provided a plan assistance of ₹45 bn in the 12th FYP to Bhutan
- Over 82 large & intermediate projects under Project Tied Assistance & 524 Small Development Projects/ HICDPs are being implemented in Bhutan



Prelims Specific

What is BBIN?

Proposed sub-regional Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) between Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, and Nepal.

Objective:

Allow trucks and commercial vehicles to use each other's highways to facilitate trade.

Timeline:

Indian proposal after Pakistan's rejection of the MVA at the 2014 SAARC summit.

Signed by the **four BBIN member countries in 2015.**

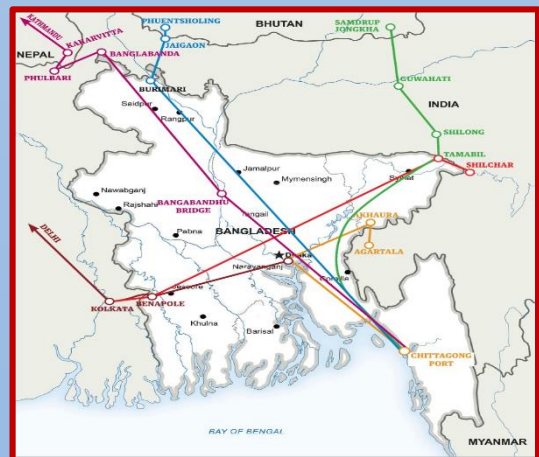
Bangladesh, India, and Nepal ratified the agreement; **Bhutan hasn't ratified it yet.**

Bhutan's Concerns:

Fear of **environmental degradation and vehicular pollution** if neighboring countries' trucks access Bhutan. Bhutan emphasizes "carbon neutrality" and environmental preservation.

Significance:

BBIN aims to **enhance rail and road connectivity** in the region.



PYQs

Mains

Q. Border management is a complex task due to difficult terrain and hostile relations with some countries. Elucidate the challenges and strategies for effective border management. (2016).



THE LEGALITY OF USING WHITE PHOSPHORUS

SOURCE: [THE HINDU](#)

WHY IN NEWS?

Human Rights Watch accuses Israel of using white phosphorus munitions in Gaza, raising concerns about civilian safety and compliance with international humanitarian law. This allegation rekindles past controversies over the use of white phosphorus in conflict.

WHAT IS WHITE PHOSPHORUS?

➤ About:

- ✓ White phosphorus is a chemical substance that ignites upon contact with oxygen.
- ✓ It's used for illumination, creating smokescreens, and as an incendiary in military applications.
- ✓ It can cause severe burns and is harmful through various exposure routes.
- ✓ The smoke it produces can also harm the eyes and respiratory tract.

➤ White Phosphorus Use in Conflict:

- ✓ Accusations against Israel for using white phosphorus munitions in Gaza.
- ✓ Similar allegations in the 2008-2009 Gaza War.
- ✓ Israel's acknowledgment of white phosphorus use, mainly in uninhabitable areas for signaling.

➤ International Concern and Past Criticism:

- ✓ UN report highlighting inadequacy in IDF's precautions in targeting certain facilities.
- ✓ The Goldstone Report condemning Israel's use of white phosphorus in civilian areas.
- ✓ Israel's pledge to abandon white phosphorus use after domestic and international outrage.

➤ Environmental and Ethical Concerns:

- ✓ Use of white phosphorus in creating smoke screens and incendiary devices.
- ✓ Ethical concerns when used in populated areas due to potential harm, including severe burns.
- ✓ International restrictions on incendiary weapons, including white phosphorus, to protect civilians.

Effects of white phosphorus on human health

International law prohibits the use of white phosphorus in densely populated civilian areas

Eyes

- Can cause blurred vision, irritation in the eyelids, corneal injury, eye perforation, and visual disturbances

Respiratory system

- Hoarseness
- Burning in throat
- Respiratory tract damage
- Suffocation
- Fluid buildup in lungs

Skin

- Can potentially lead to internal burns or tissue damage

Other effects

- Kidney failure
- Liver failure
- Heart failure

Environmental impact of white phosphorus

Alongside human health, white phosphorus munitions inflict severe damage upon the environment

EFFECTS ON WATER

- When contaminated in water, it can go undetected for years in water
- Can be toxic to aquatic organisms
- Can flow into water basins
- Can lead to further contamination of air and soil

EFFECTS ON VEGETATION

- Cause damage to plants upon contact, and may kill them in short term
- Can contribute to overfertilization and promote growth of plants, weeds, algae in long term when it enters water bodies
- Can cause overabundance of seaside vegetation, impacting aquatic life and coastal ecosystems

White phosphorus is ignited by contact with air, and continues to burn unless deprived of oxygen or the phosphorus is consumed

HARMFUL IMPACT OF WHITE PHOSPHORUS REMAINS IN WATER AND SOIL FOR YEARS



INTERNATIONAL LAW REGARDING USE OF WHITE PHOSPHORUS

➤ International Humanitarian Law:

- ✓ Compliance with international humanitarian law principles of distinction and proportionality.
- ✓ Prohibition of indiscriminate attacks that disproportionately harm civilians.
- ✓ Protocol III under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)

addressing incendiary weapons.

➤ Protocol III: Incendiary Weapons:

- ✓ Protocol III's definition of an "incendiary weapon."
- ✓ Exception for munitions causing unintended incendiary effects.
- ✓ White phosphorus primarily intended for illuminating and smokescreen effects.

➤ Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC):

- ✓ White phosphorus not covered by the CWC.
- ✓ The importance of upholding international law, treaties, and protocols.
- ✓ Strengthening Protocol III to create binding agreements and reduce ambiguity for enforcement.

➤ Global Hazard Classification:

- ✓ According to the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals, white phosphorus is categorized as a "Pyrophoric solid, category 1."

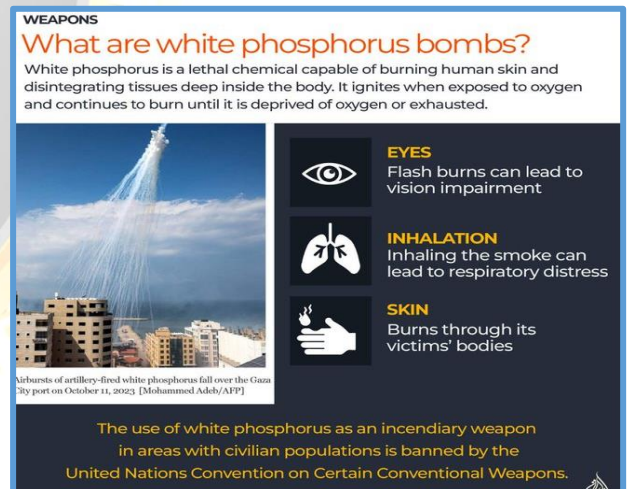
- ✓ This classification identifies substances that can catch fire spontaneously when exposed to air, making white phosphorus one of the most unstable pyrophoric materials.

➤ Military Applications:

- ✓ White phosphorus is utilized in artillery shells, bombs, rockets, and can be delivered using felt-soaked wedges.
- ✓ Its primary military use is as a smokescreen, obscuring troop movements and interfering with infrared optics and weapons tracking systems.
- ✓ It can also serve as an incendiary weapon, as seen in the second battle of Fallujah in Iraq in 2004.

➤ Harmful Effects:

- ✓ Exposure to white phosphorus can cause severe burns, respiratory problems, and damage to infrastructure, crops, and livestock.





- ✓ It can lead to raging fires, particularly in windy conditions.

Prelims Specific

Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)

Overview:

- ✓ The CWC is a **global treaty that prohibits chemical weapons and mandates** their destruction within a specified timeframe.
- ✓ Negotiations for the **convention began in 1980** at the **United Nations Conference on Disarmament**.
- ✓ The **CWC was drafted in September 1992**, opened for **signature in January 1993**, and became effective in April 1997.
- ✓ It **enforces the mandatory destruction** of old and abandoned chemical weapons.
- ✓ The **Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)** was **established in 1997** to oversee and enforce the CWC's terms.

Membership:

- ✓ The **CWC has 192 state parties and 165 signatories**.
- ✓ **India is a signatory to the convention**.

Prohibitions:

- ✓ The development, **production, acquisition, stockpiling, or retention of chemical weapons**.
- ✓ **Transferring** of chemical weapons.
- ✓ Using chemical weapons.
- ✓ **Assisting other States to indulge** in activities that are **prohibited by the CWC**.
- ✓ Using riot-control devices as '**warfare methods**'.