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## Cultural Exchange Programme between India and Mongolia

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### Why in News

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Recently, the Minister of State for Culture discussed various issues under the **Cultural Exchange Programme** with his Mongolian counterpart.



### Key Points

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- **Highlights of the Meet:**

- Strengthening the **strategic partnership**- established in 2015.
- The **Cultural Exchange Program** between India and Mongolia stands renewed until 2023.
- **10 dedicated ICCR scholarships** for studying '**Tibetan Buddhism**' have been allocated for Mongolians to study in specialized institutes of CIBS, Leh and CUTS, Varanasi, starting from 2020-2021.
  - The **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)** is an **autonomous organisation of the Government of India**, involved in **India's external cultural relations (cultural diplomacy)**, through cultural exchange with other countries and their peoples.
  - **Tibetan Buddhism combines the essential teachings of Mahayana Buddhism with Tantric and Shamanic**, and material from an ancient Tibetan religion called Bon.
- India reiterated its commitment for **digitization of Buddhist manuscripts in Gandan monastery and would consider Mongolia's request for assistance in setting up a museum-cum-library** there.
- The Ministry of Culture is likely to complete reprinting of about **100 sets of sacred Mongolian Kanjur** by 2022 for distribution in the main centers of Buddhism in Mongolia.
  - **Mongolian Kanjur** is a **Buddhist canonical text in 108 volumes** and is considered to be the most important religious text in Mongolia. It has been translated from Tibetan and is **written in classical mongolian**.
  - In the Mongolian language 'Kanjur' means 'Concise Orders'- the words of Lord Buddha in particular.
- Highlighted steps taken to **facilitate the visa and travel of Buddhist monks from Mongolia** within India.

- **India-Mongolia Relations:**

- **Historical Relations:**

India and Mongolia have interacted through **Buddhism** throughout history.

- **Diplomatic Relations:**

- India was the first country outside the former Soviet bloc of nations to open diplomatic relations with Mongolia in 1955.
- In 2015, Mongolia witnessed the first ever visit by the Prime Minister of India (a part of **India's Act East policy**).

- **International Cooperation:**

- Mongolia has publicly reiterated its **support for India's membership to the permanent seat of the expanded United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**.
- India has played an important role in **getting Mongolia membership to key international forums**, including the **United Nations (UN)**, despite strong opposition from China and Taiwan. India also championed the **inclusion of Mongolia in the Non-Aligned Movement**.

In a reciprocal gesture, **Mongolia co-sponsored a 1972 UN resolution** with India and Bhutan **for the recognition of the newly liberated Bangladesh**.

- Other Forums of which both the countries are members: **Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)**, **World Trade Organisation (WTO)**.

India is a member whereas Mongolia is an observer state at the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**.

- **Economic Cooperation:**

- India - Mongolia bilateral trade was USD 35.3 million in 2020, down from USD 38.3 million in 2019.
- India has undertaken the **'Mongol refinery project'** under its Lines of Credit (LoC) programme.

- **Cultural Cooperation:**

- The **India-Mongolian Agreement on Cultural Cooperation**, signed in 1961, has governed the **Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP)** between the two countries.
- The Agreement envisages co-operation in the fields of education by way of scholarships, exchange of experts, participation in conferences, etc.

- **Defence Cooperation:**

- Joint defence exercises code-named **Nomadic Elephant**.
- India is also an active participant in an annual week-long joint training exercise called the **Khaan Quest**, hosted by Mongolia.

- **Cooperation over Environmental Issues:**

Part of the **Bishkek Declaration (snow leopard)**.

## Way Forward

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- Mongolia's strategic position at the cross junction of Central Asia, Northeast Asia, far East, China and Russia attracts major powers towards it. India should consider Mongolia as a green zone of economic development that absorbs hi-tech features and production skills in a modernization process.
- To preserve and promote the common heritage of Indo-Mongolian culture is important. This should serve as the basis for nurturing and pursuing future common interests.

**Source: PIB**