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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. 'There has been a shift in India's Tibet Policy.' Discuss the statement in the event of increasing tensions between India and China. (250 Words)

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Approach

- Introduce by writing about the increasing tensions between India and China.
- Discuss India's Tibet policy and recent trends and challenges associated with it.
- Give a way forward.

Introduction

Recently, there has been an increased tension in the India-China relations, due to the Chinese transgressions into Indian territory, across the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh.

This has led to a rise in the intensity of troop concentration, which has aggravated the current face-off in eastern Ladakh becoming a bigger military confrontation.

Body

Background of India's Tibet Policy

- For centuries, Tibet was India's actual neighbour, as most of India's boundaries and the LAC is with the Tibetan Autonomous Region, and not the rest of China.
- After China's full accession of Tibet in 1950, the McMahon line divided the two countries.
- In 1954, India signed an agreement with China, agreeing to recognize Tibet as "**Tibet region of China**".
- In 1959, following the **Tibetan uprising**, the Dalai Lama (spiritual leader of Tibetan people) and many of his followers fled to India.
- The then Indian government gave him and Tibetan refugees shelter, and helped in setting up the Tibetan government in exile.
- The official Indian policy is that the Dalai Lama is a spiritual leader, and the Tibetan community in India, with more than a lakh exiles, is not allowed to undertake any political activity.

Shift in India's Tibet Policy

The shift in the Tibet policy, earmarks the Indian government actively managing with the Dalai Lama in public forums. For Example,

- In 2014, Prime Minister of India (PM) had invited the head of the Tibetan government in exile in India, Lobsang Sangay, to his swearing in ceremony.
- Recently, the Prime Minister of India (PM) wished the Dalai Lama in the first such public acknowledgement since 2013, the first time as PM.
- India celebrated the Dalai Lama's birthday. Some Chinese nationals protested against the celebration of the birthday of the Dalai Lama in India.

Challenges Associated with India's Approach to Tibet Policy

- **Changes in Tibetan Demography:** Over the past few decades, China is promoting people from mainland China to migrate into Tibet.
 - China is increasing suppression of the Tibetan populations' links to the Dalai Lama and pouring in investment, infrastructure projects in the region.
- **Tibetans Against Each Other:** As India-China tensions grow and turn violent after the Galwan valley clash, China has begun to raise Tibetan Militia groups.
 - Further, the Indian Army trains the Tibetan Special Frontier Force, which could lead to Tibetans fighting each other in the future.
- **Issue of Tibetan Citizenship:** The Indian government doesn't give citizenship to Tibetans born in India after the cut-off year of 1987.
 - This has created a sense of dissatisfaction amongst the youth of the Tibetan community.
 - Further, in the past few years, the US has also increased its role, by accepting more Tibetan refugees. This will impact India's role as a sole entity arguing about the future of Tibetan refugee.
- There's Chinese dams on the upper riparian areas of the Brahmaputra, and construction of Tibetan villages along the LAC which can prove to be a future flashpoint.
- **Question of Dalai Lama's Succession:** The 86 years old Dalai Lama is not only the spiritual leader, but the political leader of the community worldwide.
 - China has made it clear it intends to announce its own Dalai Lama and try to control the succession.

Conclusion

India currently has an executive policy (not a law) on Tibetans in India. While the current policy was a significant development for Tibetans' welfare in India, it is devoid of legal backing on core issues of Tibet.

It is high time now that India should also adopt a more assertive stand on the Tibet issue in dealing with China.

Further, India should avoid a situation where it has a young and restive Tibetan population that resides in India, but looks outside of India for its leadership and command structure after the Dalai Lama has passed.