



India's Tibet Policy

Why in News

Recently, some Chinese nationals protested against the celebration of the birthday of the Dalai Lama in India.

- The Dalai Lama and Tibet is one of the [major irritants between India and China relations](#).
- China considers the Dalai Lama a separatist, who has great influence over Tibetans. India seeks to use Tibetan card in order to counter China's continuing aggression at the Line of Actual Control.



Key Points

- **Background of India's Tibet Policy:**
 - For centuries, **Tibet was India's actual neighbour**, as most of India's boundaries and the 3500km LAC is with the Tibetan Autonomous Region, and not the rest of China.
 - In 1914, it was Tibetan representatives, along with the Chinese that **signed the Simla convention with British India that delineated boundaries**.
 - However, after **China's full accession of Tibet in 1950**, that **China repudiated the convention and the McMahon line** that divided the two countries.
 - Further, **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.
 - **Former Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru** 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:**

- In the event of increasing tensions between India and China, there has been a shift in India's Tibet Policy. This shift in the 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.
 - However, he did not invite him in 2019 after being re-elected for a second five-year term, to ensure a smooth passage for a **second informal summit** between him and Chinese president Xi Jinping.
 - Recently, the Prime Minister of India (PM) wished the Dalai Lama in the first such public acknowledgement since 2013, the first time as PM.
- The shift in India's Tibet policy is **majorly focused on symbolic aspects**, but there are **many challenges** pertaining to India's Approach to Tibet Policy.

▪ **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.
- **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.
 - The Dalai Lama asserts that his successor could be a living incarnation, in a specific area in India or even in another country like Taiwan.

Way Forward

- 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. For example, destructive Tibetans' demand for freedom in Tibet.
- Therefore, 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.

Source: TH