



Dalai Lama

For Prelims: Tibetan Government in Exile, Buddhism, Line of Actual Control, McMahon line.

For Mains: Impact of Dalai Lama and Tibet on India-China Relations.

Why in News

Recently, the **last surviving member of a small troop** of Indian soldiers **who escorted the Dalai Lama** as he fled from Tibet in 1959 has died.

Key Points

▪ About:

- The Dalai Lama **belongs to the Gelugpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism**, which is the largest and most influential tradition in Tibet.
- There have been **only 14 Dalai Lamas in the history of Tibetan Buddhism**, and the first and second Dalai Lamas were given the title posthumously.
 - The 14th and current Dalai Lama is **Tenzin Gyatso**.
- The Dalai Lamas are believed to be **manifestations of Avalokiteshvara or Chenrezig**, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and the patron saint of Tibet.
 - Bodhisattvas are realized beings inspired by a wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings, who have vowed to be reborn in the world to help humanity.

▪ Dalai Lama's Escort:

- The political landscape of China **started changing in the 1950s**.
- Plans were made to **bring Tibet officially under Chinese control**. But in March 1959, Tibetans took to the streets demanding an end to Chinese rule. Chinese People's Republic troops crushed the revolt and thousands were killed.
- The **Dalai Lama fled from Tibet to India with thousands of followers during the 1959 Tibetan uprising**, where he was welcomed by former Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru who gave him permission **to form the 'Tibetan government in exile' in Dharamsala** (Himachal Pradesh).

▪ Process to Choose Dalai Lama:

- Following the Buddhist belief in the **principle of reincarnation**, the current Dalai Lama is believed by Buddhists to be able to choose the body into which he is reincarnated.
- That person, when found, will then become the next Dalai Lama.
- According to Buddhist scholars it is the **responsibility of the High Lamas of the Gelugpa tradition and the Tibetan government** to seek out and find the next Dalai Lama following the death of the incumbent.
- If more than one candidate is identified, the true successor is found by officials and monks drawing lots in a public ceremony.
- Once identified, the successful candidate and his family are taken to Lhasa (or Dharamsala) where the child studies the Buddhist scriptures in order to prepare for spiritual leadership.
- This process can take several years: it took four years to find the 14th (current) Dalai

Lama.

- The search is generally limited to Tibet, although the current Dalai Lama has said that there is a chance that he will not be reborn, and that if he is, it will not be in a country under Chinese rule.

Tibet and Dalai Lama: Impact on India-China Relations

▪ Background:

- For centuries, **Tibet was India's actual neighbour**, as most of India's boundaries and the 3500km **LAC (Line of Actual Control)** 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**".

▪ Current:

- 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 the **Tibetan card in order to counter China's continuing aggression** at the **Line of Actual Control.**
- 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.
- 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.

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.
- 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.

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