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TAWANG MATTERS

Significance for Prelims: Tawang Map

Significance for Mains: Threats emerging from Border areas(Indo-China Conflict at LAC).

News: The Tawang sector in Arunachal Pradesh has long been a theatre for contentious border scuffles. Recently on December 9, Indian and Chinese soldiers clashed in the Tawang sector. It's the Tawang where the 1962 India-China war first began and was also the last place of implementation of the ceasefire.

Historical backdrop of Tawang:

- **1914 Simla Agreement between British India and Tibetan ruler Lonchen Shatra:** In this agreement linear boundary, the McMahon Line was created.
- After that, Tawang had been administered by Tibetan officials through monastic and non-monastic tributes. The Lonchen Shatra was aware of the sensitivity of the Tawang transfer, hence suggested 'quick and tactful' transfer of the district by British India.
- But since the British became embroiled in World War I in Europe, and so Tawang matter was set aside but not completely forgotten.
- From the 1920s onward, China became stronger and more interested in Tibet, British Indian administrators reinforced their claim on Tawang.
- In 1937, British Indian Officers of Assam asked the Government of India to challenge Chinese activities that may support China's claim to Tawang or even Bhutan and Sikkim.
- After that, to emphasise the British Indian interests, the Government decided to conduct actual tours or collect the revenue itself, in the Tawang area and stop relying on mere reproduction of the McMahon Line on Survey of India maps.
- **Tawang expeditions by Capt. G.A. Nevill in 1914 and Lightfoot in 1938** came back with recommendations to set up some administration in Tawang. Nevill, who remained in the Tawang region from 1913 to 1928, recommended the stationing of a European officer, at least for a time, at Tawang. Nevill wrote in a prescient note that "should China gain control of Tibet the Tawang country is particularly adapted for a secret and easy entrance into India". It would proved correct in the 1962 war.
- **Recommendations of Lightfoot:** Tibetan government should withdraw their officials and convert the Tawang monastery into a Monpa monastery. Monpas should be elected to the religious high offices of the monastery in Tawang. For the first time in 2008, after 70 years, the Dalai Lama appointed a local Monpa monk from a village south of Se La as Rimpoche of the monastery.
- Then, the acting Governor of Assam, Gilbert Hogg, accepted Lightfoot's recommendations and forwarded them to the Government of India. Their recommendations were followed up with a proposal to send yet another expedition while pending a decision on administering Tawang, but these plans ended after the rise of Hitler and Britain's entry into World War II.

About Tawang:

- The valley is wedged between Tibet and Bhutan.
- Se La pass at the height of 13,700 ft, connecting the Tawang valley with the mainland.

- Se La pass is the entry point for the administrative jurisdiction of Tawang.
- Dalai Lama entered India through the Tawang region in 1959 after Chinese incursion in Tibet.
- Invasion of China in 1962 happened through the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh.
- Area is populated mainly by Monpas. These are adherents of Tibetan Buddhism but have distinct local ethnic identities.
- People of Tawangpas are the only Indians who lived under foreign occupation in 1962 after independence from colonial rule.
- **Regular border skirmish imposes trauma on the local people:** In December 1962, when the Chinese forces advanced across the Indian border, the Indian administration and the soldiers retreated towards Assam. The locals, fearing they would meet the same fate as their Tibetan brethren, tried to flee their homes. But, many locals were not able to so they spent days in the jungles as Chinese soldiers built camps in Monpa villages.
- **Recent developments in Tawang:** After strengthening The Chinese action in Tawang, the government of India strengthened the border infrastructure in the Tawang sector. For example, the Se La Tunnel, which would provide an all-weather road to the Indian security forces in Tawang, is going to be ready early next year.

Geography of recent contention:

- Recent place of latest clashes between India and China i.e. Yangtse lies between two high mountain passes, Bum La and Tulung La. On October 20, 1975 Chinese forces ambushed an Assam Rifles patrol on 17,300 ft high Tulung La pass, which is also near Yangtse.
- Tawang sector remains the biggest bone of contention in border settlement talks between India and China.
- Difference in interpretation of 2005 Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question between India and China. In India, there was perception that while demarcating the boundary, "the two sides shall safeguard due interests of their settled populations in the border areas". But there is a different interpretation of the agreement by Chinese interlocutors who have since claimed Tawang.
- **Response from New Delhi:** It is neither "possible nor practical" for India to concede Tawang in a border settlement.

Tawang after Independence:

- British India exerted control over areas south of Se La towards the end of World War. But realising the full territorial potential of the 1914 Simla Convention and implementing the McMahon Line on the ground was left for the successor Indian state devolved after August 15, 1947.
- Partition of India and the work of assimilation of princely states hampered the new Indian Government. So, India did not immediately enter Tawang and entered in Tawang only after the Chinese government declared the 1914 Simla Convention null and void in November 1949. Chinese Ambassador refused to recognise the legitimacy of the Indian Mission in Lhasa and the Trade Agencies in Yatung and Gyantse in reply to an Indian Government.
- After that Indian Government made its mind to move. Governor of Assam's advisor N.K. Rustomji, issued formal instructions in 1950 to Maj. Ralengnao Khathing of 2 Assam Rifles to set up Indian administration: "Your task is to occupy Tawang." Maj. Khathing rode on February 6, 1951, to claim Tawang as Indian territory that changed not only the map of India but also the fate of the people in the area.

Impact of successful entry into Tawang:

- New Delhi consolidated and administered then Arunachal Pradesh, known as North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA).
- Creation of the new Indian Frontier Administrative Service (IFAS) in the early 1950s: These cadres were personally interviewed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.
- Due to strategic pressures that emerged from China, more elaborate and complex administrative and military structures had to be set up in the heart of the tribal areas.

- Interruption of the implementation of the policy in its original suiting the local needs , years of sensitive handling of the border areas left lasting impact on the people in these areas who saw themselves as Indians even as India appeared to be losing the war with China in 1962.

Se La pass: It separates the Tawang valley from the rest of the Monpa belt to its south.

Source: The Hindu

Article: Why Tawang matters

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योजना है तो सफलता है