

India and Bhutan have the potential to change the development story of the region. Comment. (150 words)

India and Bhutan share a unique and time tested bilateral relationship, comprised of utmost trust and mutual understanding. Formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan were established in the year 1968. From then on, this one of a kind relationship is sustained by a tradition of regular high level visits and dialogues between the two countries.

The recent decisions made by India and Bhutan have the potential to change the development story of the region:

- ① Firstly, to focus on infrastructure and connectivity is an important driver to regional development. This includes,
 - Ⓐ A joint statement on completing surveys for the mail link that connects Bhutan to Assam.
 - Ⓑ Initiating discussions on another mail link between Bhutan and West Bengal.
 - Ⓒ Another mail link project between Bhutan and Bangladesh to facilitate trade between them.

- ② Bhutan's economy is largely dependent on hydropower and tourism revenues. Government of India has been cooperating with Bhutan in many areas with hydropower being the core.
- ③ India's energy exchange is bringing more Bhutanese and Nepali hydropower suppliers on stream, while planning to distribute energy to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka will drive intra-regional growth.
- ④ India is Bhutan's largest trading partner. The new initiative by the Bhutanese king to build a special economic zone at the border with Assam is expected to drive growth and attract investment, by creating more markets for the region.

These plans would empower India's attempt to bridge the economic gap between the Northeast & the mainland, while drawing world bank & donor countries like Japan to the creation of a sub-regional hub. For India and the surrounding region, working together in harmony by building infrastructure, enhancing connectivity and energy links is the sustainable way forward for the development of the region as a whole. Efficient and time-bound execution is therefore the key to such ambitious plans.