Dalai Lama’s Visit to Tawang

Why in news?

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His Holiness the Dalai Lama recently visited Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh.

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Who is Dalai Lama?

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- The Dalai is the head monk of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism.
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- He is considered to be the successor in a line of tulkus who are believed to be incarnations of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.
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- Until the 1950s, the Dalai Lamas headed the Tibetan government.
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- As per the tradition, indications about the next Dalai Lama would be left behind by the present one.
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- Panchen Lama, second only to The Dalai Lama is traditionally recognized by the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama is part of the process by which each new Dalai Lama is chosen.
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Why did he visit Tawang?

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- The Dalai Lama’s visit was purely religious and spiritual.
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- He has himself clarified that the visit was a routine one like the ones he had undertaken to that state on six earlier occasions.
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- He restricts himself to preaching and sermons and occasionally participates in other events.

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- He hardly raises political issues, much less the happenings in Tibet or China.
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Why did India allow the visit?

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- Allowing him to visit any other part of India but not Arunachal Pradesh will amount to acknowledging that the state constitutes a disputed territory.
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- It is in line with the Indian government’s consistent position to respect him as a religious leader but that he is not permitted to engage in anti-China political activities.
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What is different this time?

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- This time, Indian government has chosen to depart from its position by openly associating Minister of State for Home with the visit thus giving it a political colour.
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- The statement by Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister that the state shares a boundary with Tibet and not with China runs counter to India is position of acknowledging that Tibet is a part of China.
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What was the reaction?

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- Every time he has visited Arunachal Pradesh, the Chinese media has reacted.
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- Visits of former President Pratibha Patil and that of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh also attracted criticism from the Chinese side.
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- But this time the Chinese reaction was more aggressive.
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Why China reacted strongly?

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- **Next Dalai Lama tussle** - The Chinese have already installed their own Panchen Lama.
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- The 14th Dalai Lama has so far not given any clear indication about the next one.
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- But the Chinese suspect that the Holiness might choose someone from India, or even from Arunachal Pradesh, as his successor.
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- Such a step will leave the movement for Tibetan independence with another leader.
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- **Territorial Claims** - During the 1962 war, Chinese troops had annexed half of what used to be called NEFA.
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- But then the Chinese side announced unilateral ceasefire and withdrew to the pre-1962 positions in the eastern sector.
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- Thus, instead of annexing Assam, the Chinese troops vacated all of western Arunachal Pradesh, including Tawang.
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- Arunachal Pradesh became disputed only after the formal joining of Sikkim in the Indian Union in 1975.
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- **Change in stance -** In 2009 China and India had drifted close to war over the Dalai Lama’s proposed visit to open a hospital in Tawang town.
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- Conflict was averted when the then Prime Minister acceded to a request to keep the international media out of Tawang and prevent it from giving the visit international significance.
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- Probably the Chinese feel that India is changing its stance under the new administartion and hence the serious warning.
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What should be done?

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- In spite of the recent issues, India needs to tread carefully on the Tibet issue.
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- This issue has particular sensitivity for China and which had been the factor that precipitated the 1962 India-China war.
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- There have been occasions in the past when the heightened tensions between the neighbours have been resolved through regular engagement.
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- This should be continued to advance in areas of convergence and to play their respective roles as stable anchors of an emerging international order.
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Source: The Indian Express

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