Shipki La Pass

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Why in News?

Himachal Pradesh has opened the Shipki La pass, a motorable mountain pass for domestic tourists, a step that locals hope will revitalize tourism and trade.

- It served as a vital trade route between ***India and Tibet*** (now part of China).
- Situated at an elevation of 3,930 metres above sea level, the pass has been part of documented trade since the 15th century.
- The communities of Kinnaur, particularly those from Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, share a deep-rooted cultural and economic relationship with Tibetan counterparts.
- Historically, the Bushahr State (now Rampur) in India and Guge in Tibet were principal players in the region's trade.
- **Imports** – Imports from Tibet included wool, pack and saddle horses, goats, sheep, mutton, yak and goatskins, yak hair, devotional items such as prayer wheels, thangkas, rosaries, and bowls, as well as borax, turquoise, and gold.
- **Exports** - Exports to Tibet from India included grains such as barley, wheat, rice, millet, lentils, chickpeas, and oil, dried fruits, vegetables, spices, tobacco, timber, copper and brass utensils, and iron tools.
- Gold and turquoise were particularly cherished, which were integral to traditional Kinnauri women's jewellery, creating constant local demand and sustaining artisan communities.
- These exchanges weren't just transactional; they shaped cultural practices, local crafts, and even dietary habits across generations.
- **Cultural connection -** The people on both sides are primarily pastoralists.
- Upper Kinnaur and the adjacent Tibetan region predominantly follow Buddhism, sustaining a spiritual and civilizational continuity even in the face of political divisions.
- Monastic traditions, festivals, and oral lore reflect a shared heritage that survives despite barriers of nationhood.
- **Recent intervention -** The Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh inaugurated tourism access to Shipki La without the previously mandatory permit system.
- Indian tourists can now visit using just their Aadhaar card, a move that has stirred optimism across the region.
- The commodities exchanged between India and Tibet through Shipki La were both diverse and valuable.

Reference

The Hindu | What is the significance of the Shipki La pass?



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