

## The Thai-Bharat Cultural Legacy

*Mains: GS Paper I | Indian Heritage and Culture, History*

### Why in News?

June 15, 2026, marks the 84<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic Bangkok Conference (1942), a critical milestone that led to the formal establishment of the Indian National Army (INA).

### What is the Thai-Bharat Cultural Lodge (TBCL)?

- **Tagore's Inspiration (1927)** - Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore visited Siam (now Thailand) and met with **King Prajadhipok (Rama VII)**, highlighting deep historical ties.
- **Arrival of Prafulla Kumar Sen (1932)** - Inspired by this civilizational vision, the Bengali scholar, later known as Swami Satyananda Puri arrived in Bangkok.
- **Core Mission** - Sen's goal was to revive and foster enduring cultural links rooted in Buddhism, philosophy, and shared epics like the Ramayana (Ramakien).
- **Institutional Setup** - Swami Satyananda Puri established the **Dharam Ashram in 1939**, which was transformed into the Thai-Bharat Cultural Lodge (TBCL) in December 1940.
- **Flag Hoisting** - Shortly after the Lodge's inception, the Indian Tricolour was boldly hoisted on the premises.
- This act served as a strong geopolitical statement that triggered severe protests from the British Ambassador.
- **Strategic Haven** - The noncompliant gesture officially established Thailand as a central hub and foundation for anti-colonial dissent.
- **Transition to Political Nexus** - With the onset of World War II in Southeast Asia, the Lodge quickly turned from cultural diplomacy to an active political and intelligence operational base for the Indian diaspora.

### Who are the key protagonists and what is the intelligence pipeline?

- **Sardar Giani Pritam Singh** - A Sikh missionary and Ghadar Party veteran who utilized local Gurdwaras and the TBCL to preach revolutionary ideals.
- He established the critical, covert intelligence pipeline with Major Iwaichi Fujiwara (head of the Japanese intelligence unit, *F-Kikan*).
- **The Indian National Council (INC)** - Founded in ***December 1941*** at the Silpakorn Theatre in Bangkok by TBCL nationalists.
- It is founded with Swami Satyananda Puri as President and Debnath Das as Secretary.
- It bridged the gap between civilian expatriates and early military mobilizations.
- **The Indian Independence League (IIL)** - Rash Behari Bose established the IIL at Tokyo, in 1942.
- The political body coordinating East Asian chapters to channel civilian resources and former Prisoners of War (PoWs) into a structured resistance.
- **INA Framework & Legacy** - Rash Behari Bose laid the foundational framework for the Indian National Army (INA), recruiting British Indian prisoners of war.
- He later handed over leadership of the League and the INA to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, ensuring its ultimate expansion.

### **What is the significance of the Bangkok Conference?**

- The Bangkok Conference, held at the Silpakorn Theatre ***on June 15-23, 1942***, brought together over a hundred representatives of Indian communities from across Burma, Malaya, and Singapore.
- **Consolidation of Factions** - It unified diverse, fragmented nationalist factions across Southeast Asia under a single, coherent political framework, designating the IIL as the central authority.
- **The Blueprint for the INA**- It adopted a comprehensive ***34-point resolution***, laid out the official structure of the INA, composed of volunteers and former Prisoners of Wars (PoW).
- **Preserving Strategic Autonomy** - The resolution strictly mandated that the INA would be supervised by the IIL rather than the Japanese military.
- It urged Tokyo to formally recognize India as an independent nation, ensuring the movement retained its agency despite relying on Japanese wartime logistics.

### **How the regional mobilization transformed under Netaji's command?**

- **The Tragic Vacuum-** In March 1942, a fatal plane crash killed Swami Satyananda Puri and Sardar Pritam Singh en route to Tokyo, threatening to derail the momentum before the June conference.
- **The Arrival of Netaji (1943)-** Subhas Chandra Bose's arrival provided the charismatic, unyielding military leadership needed to unify regional councils.
- **Total Mobilization -** Netaji accelerated the transition into a mass-mobilization campaign, elevating the relationship with Japan into a high-stakes diplomatic partnership.
- It secures the full recognition for the *Provisional Government of Free India (Arzi Hukumat-e-Azad Hind)*.
- **The TBCL as a Covert Bridge -** As the INA marched toward the Indian border, the TBCL remained a vital sanctuary, providing civilian, intellectual, and logistical cover for the families and networks backing the frontline troops.

### How does it survive after the world war?

- **Allied Suppression and Re-emergence-** Banned by Allied forces in 1945 with its leaders imprisoned, the TBCL was resiliently revived in 1946 through the efforts of Pandit Raghunath Sharma.
- **Living Archive -** Today, the Lodge stands as a living museum in Bangkok, housing rare texts, historical photographs, and documents managed by the descendants of the Indian diaspora.
- It remains an enduring monument to Indo-Thai historic friendship and the shared struggle against colonial rule.

### What is the way forward?

- **Institutionalizing Shared Heritage -** India's *Act East Policy* should move beyond maritime security and trade.
- It should actively preserve and fund external historical landmarks like the TBCL, integrating them into an official transnational freedom trail.
- **Declassifying Southeast Asian Archives -** Joint historical research commissions between India, Thailand, and Japan are needed to digitize and study regional records.
- It ensures this pivotal chapter of the external freedom struggle moves from the margins to the mainstream of historical textbooks.
- **Leveraging Diaspora Diplomacy-** The deep-rooted social networks of the Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia, which originally sustained the INA, should be celebrated as vital cultural bridges for modern bilateral

relations.

## **Reference**

[The Hindu | Thai-Bharat Cultural Lodge \(TBCL\)](#)

