



## PM MODI VISIT TO BRUNEI VISIT : INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

**NEWS :** *Eye on China, Modi in Brunei: India backs policy of development, not expansionism*

### WHAT'S IN THE NEWS ?

PM Modi met Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah in Brunei's capital Bandar Seri Begawan and stressed the need to respect "freedom of navigation and overflight".

### PM Modi's Visit to Brunei and Bilateral Relations:

#### Brunei Darussalam:

- A small, wealthy nation in Southeast Asia, located on the northern coast of Borneo, consisting of two separate parts.
- **Capital:** Bandar Seri Begawan.
- **Borders:** Apart from its northern coastline on the South China Sea, Brunei is entirely surrounded by the Malaysian state of Sarawak.

#### Political and Economic Context:

- **Commonwealth and ASEAN Member:** Brunei plays an active role in both organizations, engaging in regional diplomacy and trade.
- **Strategic Location:** Its location on the South China Sea is vital, given the territorial disputes in the region, particularly with China.

#### Geographical Features:

- **Landforms:** Brunei has a narrow coastal plain to the north, with rugged hills and forests to the south.
- **Highest Peak:** Pagon Peak, which lies in the southern region.
- **Rivers:** Major rivers include the Belait, Tutong, Brunei, and Pandaruan rivers.
- **Climate:** Brunei experiences an equatorial climate, heavily influenced by the monsoon systems.

#### Defence Collaboration:

- **Existing Cooperation:** Defence relations between India and Brunei are based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2016, renewed in 2021. These agreements facilitate high-level exchanges, joint naval exercises, defence training, and participation in defence exhibitions.
- **Future Prospects:** During Modi's visit, discussions included the establishment of a joint working group to further enhance defence cooperation.



## Commercial and Cultural Ties:

- **Economic Relations:** Modi's visit emphasizes boosting trade and commerce between India and Brunei, capitalizing on Brunei's wealth and India's market potential.
- **Cultural Relations:** Brunei has historical ties with India, and the Indian diaspora, particularly in the fields of healthcare and education, plays a significant role in enhancing these relations.

## Strategic Importance:

- **Act East Policy:** Brunei is crucial to India's "Act East" policy, which seeks to strengthen economic, strategic, and cultural ties with Southeast Asia. The policy is key to counterbalancing China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **South China Sea Role:** As a country situated on the South China Sea, Brunei holds strategic significance, especially in the context of regional disputes over maritime territory with China.
- **Space Cooperation:** Brunei has supported India's space program by hosting a Telemetry, Tracking, and Command (TTC) station since 2000, which has played a crucial role in India's satellite missions.

## Historical Context:

- **Diplomatic Relations:** This visit marks the 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties between India and Brunei. Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, Brunei's monarch, has visited India four times, reflecting strong bilateral relations.

## Conclusion:

- PM Modi's visit to Brunei is strategically important, deepening ties in defence, commerce, and culture at a time of increasing tensions in the Indo-Pacific.
- It reinforces India's commitment to its **"Act East" policy**, which promotes connectivity, trade, and cultural exchange with Southeast Asian nations.
- **Act East Policy** aims to foster economic cooperation, strengthen cultural ties, and develop strategic relationships with the Indo-Pacific nations while also boosting the development of India's Northeastern Region.

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**P.L. RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY | 1447/C, 3rd floor, 15th Main Road,  
Anna Nagar West, Chennai-40. Ph.No.044-42323192, 9445032221  
Email: plrajmemorial@gmail.com Website: www.plrajiacademy.com  
Telegram link: <https://t.me/plrajiacademy> YouTube: P L RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY**



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