International Relations · GS - II

Examine the role of cross-border railway connectivity in strengthening India's neighbourhood diplomacy, with particular reference to the Ayodhya–Janakpur connection. How can religious tourism contribute to regional integration?

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
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MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Neighbourhood First Policy, Ramayana circuit, people-to-people ties, cross-border infrastructure, religious tourism, economic cooperation, cultural diplomacy

Model Answer

Introduction

India and Nepal share deep historical, cultural and civilisational links. Railway connectivity between Ayodhya and Janakpur can strengthen these ties by facilitating pilgrimage, tourism and economic exchanges across the international border.

Role of Cross-Border Railway Connectivity

1. **Strengthening bilateral relations:** Transport connectivity creates regular institutional and people-to-people interactions, reinforcing mutual trust between neighbouring countries.

2. **Promoting religious tourism:** Ayodhya and Janakpur are important destinations associated with the Ramayana tradition. Improved access can encourage cross-border pilgrimages.

3. **Economic opportunities:** Increased tourist movement can generate employment in hospitality, transport, local handicrafts and small businesses.

4. **Regional integration:** Railway networks can complement road connectivity and facilitate trade, mobility and access to regional markets.

5. **Cultural diplomacy:** Shared religious and historical traditions provide opportunities for cooperation beyond conventional diplomatic and economic engagement.

Challenges to Address

1. **Infrastructure coordination:** Railway operations require compatible technical standards, border facilities and coordinated timetables.

2. **Border management:** Efficient passenger verification, customs procedures and security arrangements are necessary without undermining the open-border framework.

3. **Unequal economic benefits:** Local communities on both sides should receive fair opportunities from tourism and infrastructure development.

4. **Sustainable tourism:** Heritage conservation, waste management and carrying-capacity assessments are essential at religious destinations.

Way Forward

1. Strengthen bilateral railway and transport coordination mechanisms.

2. Develop integrated tourism circuits connecting major religious and cultural destinations.

3. Improve multilingual passenger services and digital ticketing facilities.

4. Encourage community participation and sustainable tourism investment.

Conclusion

Cross-border rail connectivity can transform shared cultural heritage into practical regional cooperation. Its success depends on efficient infrastructure, mutual coordination and inclusive economic benefits, reinforcing India's Neighbourhood First approach.