

ISRO's New Station in Bhutan to Counter China's Tibet Facility

Satellite tracking and data reception centre likely to double up as a strategic asset; China uses observatory in Tibet Autonomous Region to track Indian satellites

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New Delhi: India is setting up a satellite tracking and data reception centre in the Himalayan state of Bhutan that will also strategically serve to counter a similar Chinese facility in the region.

The Indian Space Research Organisation's ground station in Bhutan is likely to double up as "a strategic asset" for the country, given its location between India and China, people aware of the matter told ET.

China has established an advanced satellite tracking centre and

astronomical observatory at Ngari in Tibet Autonomous Region, about 125 km away from the Line of Actual Control, which serves as the de-facto border between India and China. The facility in Tibet is so advanced that apart from tracking Indian satellites, it can also "blind" them, the people said.

Although ISRO's ground station in Bhutan is intended to help the Himalayan state take advantage of the South Asia Satellite, it is also India's way of counterbalancing the Chinese station in Tibet.

This strategy is significant in the backdrop of the Doklam crisis, when the Chinese tried to construct

STRATEGIC ASSET

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a road at a tri-junction between India, Bhutan and China. Bhutan stood firmly with India during the 72-day face-off between the Indian ar-

my and the Chinese People's Liberation Army at Doklam in western Bhutan in June-August, 2017.

At the PM-level talks here last Fri-

day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said construction of the ISRO ground station in Bhutan would be completed soon.

BHUTAN'S ADVANTAGE



ISRO's ground station in Bhutan intended to help the Himalayan state take advantage of the South Asia Satellite

"Space science is the new dimension of our cooperation (with Bhutan)," he said in a statement after meeting new Bhutanese Prime Mi-

nister Lotay Tshering. "With the completion of this project, Bhutan will get help in tasks such as weather information, tele-medicine and disaster relief in the far-flung areas of the country."

ISRO launched the South Asia Satellite on May 5, 2017. Modi had in 2014 mooted the idea of a satellite for members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation so that India could share the benefits of advances in space technology with its South Asian neighbours.

India also pledged ₹4,500 crore as assistance to Bhutan to support the Himalayan state's 12th five-year-plan for development.