For the first time, Tibet has passed a law making ethnic unity mandatory, reflecting the significant role it plays in the sensitive remote Himalayan region's economic and social development.

About the new law

- The People's Congress of Tibet on Saturday passed the legislation, which will take effect from May 1, guaranteeing ethnic unity in the territory.
- The new law makes it clear that Tibet has been an inalienable part of China since ancient times, and it is the common responsibility for the people of all ethnic groups to safeguard national reunification, strengthen ethnic unity and take a clear-cut stand against separatism.
- This is the first legislation on ethnic unity at the autonomous region level across China.
- The law reflects the important role of ethnic unity in the region's economic and social development.

Tibet's demography

- There are more than 40 ethnic minorities accounting for 95 per cent of Tibet's over three million population.
- Official figures released by China in March last year on Tibet said the region's population has grown from 1.23 million in 1959 to 3.44 million in 2018, with Tibetans accounting for over 90 per cent.

All is not well in Tibet

- China says Tibet for centuries has been its territory well before the People's Liberation Army (PLA) took control of the region in 1950.
- Overseas Tibetan groups allege large scale migration from Chinese
mainland to Tibet to exploit the abundant natural resources in the Himalayan region which is resented by the local population.

- About 150 Tibetans have committed self-immolation since 2009 calling for the return of the Dalai Lama from his exile in India and improvement of human rights conditions in the homeland of the top Tibetan Buddhist leader.

- China terms Dalai Lama as a splittist and a separatist.

- In November, China objected to the US plans to take up the issue of the successor to the 84-year-old Dalai Lama to United Nations saying that Washington is misusing UN platform to interfere in its internal affairs. Beijing asserts that his successor should be endorsed by it.

**Similar law introduced in Xinjiang 4 years ago**

Like Tibet, Xinjiang is a region of China that houses multiple ethnic minorities. Legislation to promote ‘ethnic unity’ was passed in Xinjiang four years ago.

Since then, China has faced severe international criticism for detaining mainly Uighur Muslims from Xinjiang in camps that Beijing says are meant to give employment training. The ethnic unity law has been used to crack down on Uighurs in Xinjiang.

**The Dalai Lama Tradition**

Dalai means Ocean and Lama mean Monk. The spiritual leader of Tibetans is therefore called the Dalai Lama since they are assumed to be Oceans of Compassion. They belong to the latest school of Tibetan Buddhism, the “Gelug” or “Yellow Hat” School.

**Selection of dalai lama**

The process of their selection is also a very unique one. Legend goes that Dalai
Lamas are “found” not selected. A few years after the first Dalai Lama passed away, a child proclaimed that he had the spirit of the Dalai Lama. After strong proofs of his enlightenment, the High Lamas took him seriously. He was announced to be the next Dalai Lama. Since then, it is believed that Dalai Lamas are tulkus, enlightened beings who can control when they will be reincarnated and as whom. This is different from popular Hindu belief where reincarnation is due to their Karma.