

AIR Spotlight - Significance of BIMSTEC

AIR Spotlight is an insightful program featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panellists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, the significance of BIMSTEC is discussed.

Context:

The article discusses the objectives, significance, and implications of BIMSTEC.

What is BIMSTEC?

- The **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation** ([BIMSTEC](#)) is a regional organization comprising seven Member States lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity.
- This sub-regional organization came into being on 6 June 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration.

Members:

- It constitutes seven Member States: five from South Asia, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and two from Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand.

Objectives:

The objectives of BIMSTEC are as follows:

- **Economic development:**
 - To create an enabling environment for rapid economic development.
- **Economic and social growth:**
 - To accelerate the economic growth and social progress in the Bay of Bengal region through joint endeavours in a spirit of equality and partnership.
- **Collaboration on common interests:**
 - To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, technical, and scientific fields.
- **Training and Research:**
 - To provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, and technical spheres.
- **Peace and stability:**
 - To maintain peace and stability in the Bay of Bengal region through close collaboration in combating international terrorism, transnational organized crimes as well as natural disasters, climate change, and communicable diseases.

- **Eradication of poverty:**
 - To endeavour to eradicate poverty from the Bay of Bengal region.
- **Promote trade and investment:**
 - To promote trade and investment as a major contributing factor to fostering economic and social development in the region.

SAARC and BIMSTEC:

- BIMSTEC is a very important regional organization for South Asia and the Bay of Bengal Region. It has much greater potential and is far more effective than [SAARC](#). The challenges facing SAARC are as follows:
- **Pakistan:**
 - Pakistan as a member of SAARC has a very non-cooperative attitude towards SAARC because they are geopolitically and economically linked to China.
- **Afghanistan:**
 - The tragic developments in Afghanistan in recent times have also impacted the effectiveness of SAARC.
- **Others:**
 - Countries are suffering from their own internal problems such as Myanmar being diplomatically isolated, Sri Lanka facing a huge economic crisis, and Nepal still emerging from economic and political uncertainties.
- Despite these challenges, the grouping can be effective because the member countries share a geopolitical common purpose.
- BIMSTEC should not be viewed as a replacement for SAARC as both have different scopes and functions though some of the interests and aims of the organizations coincide with each other at times.
- BIMSTEC is a kind of bridge organization between South Asia and Southeast Asia. It easily fits into the larger infrastructure connectivity plan for the entire region.
- It helps in advancing India's strategic interest in South Asia and also in South East Asia.

Strategic significance of BIMSTEC for India:

Act East Policy:

- BIMSTEC connects India's northeast with BIMSTEC countries and acts as a platform to realize India's Neighbourhood First Policy and [Act East Policy](#).

Development:

- The cooperation enables economic development in the region, removing its isolated nature and addressing the issues faced by the region and also provides better connectivity.

- India boosts education cooperation by providing scholarships to BIMSTEC member countries and enhances the people-to-people linkages through heritage and culture.

BBIN:

- The India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway is under talks to extend it further to Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam; the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Corridor and the Bangladesh Bhutan India Nepal (BBIN) initiative are the focus areas of BIMSTEC.

Link to South Asia:

- BIMSTEC is the only platform through which India can project and extract its interests in South Asia without a hindrance from Pakistan, also enabling India to counter the Chinese influence in its neighbourhood.

COVID-19 Pandemic and BIMSTEC:

- BIMSTEC becomes the platform for stronger collective action among member states and assists the member countries in efficiently distributing the COVID-19 vaccines.
- Though the BIMSTEC partnerships are found in areas related to health, knowledge, and education, there is a possibility that the organization may reconsider cooperation in all sectors as the whole world is still economically down due to the pandemic, and cooperation and mutual assistance may be more focused on areas that are directly involved in the economy enabling the BIMSTEC nations to revive its economy.

Agendas to be discussed at the summit:

- The Covid pandemic-related challenges.
- The uncertainties within the international system that all BIMSTEC members are facing, impart greater urgency to the goal of taking BIMSTEC technical and economic cooperation to the next level.

Conclusion:

The 5th BIMSTEC Summit happened in March 2022. The grouping holds a very significant role for India and it is expected that the summit will bring some positive outcomes for the member countries.

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