2nd Retreat of the Foreign Ministers of the BIMSTEC

Source: IE

Why in News?

The 2nd Retreat of the Foreign Ministers of the **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical** and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was held in New Delhi, taking on added significance amid escalating tensions and major developments in Myanmar.

 External Affairs Minister of India emphasised the need for BIMSTEC to address regional challenges internally, especially in light of recent setbacks faced by <u>Myanmar's military junta against</u> various Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs).

Note: This retreat is the first major event since the **<u>BIMSTEC Charter</u>** came into effect in 2024, marking a significant milestone in the organisation's evolution. The 1st edition of the BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Retreat was held in Bangkok, Thailand in 2023.

What are the Key Highlights of the BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Retreat?

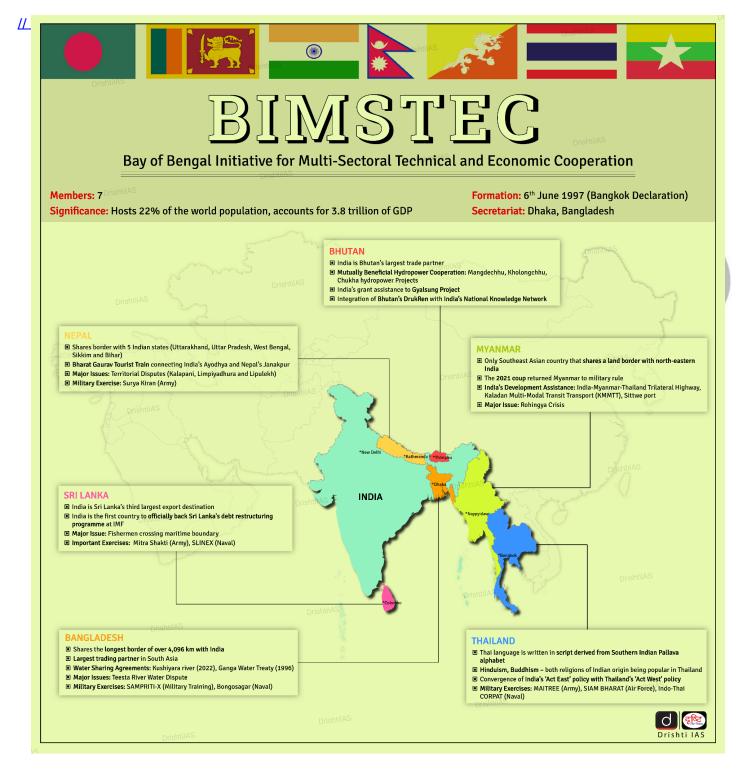
- Global and Regional Developments: The meeting underscored the urgency of addressing longstanding goals like capacity building and economic cooperation due to current global and regional challenges.
- Myanmar Crisis: Discussions centred on the impact of the Myanmar crisis on regional stability and developmental projects. The instability in Myanmar is a major concern for BIMSTEC as it has affected various developmental and connectivity projects aimed at strengthening ties among Nepal, Bhutan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Thailand.
- Humanitarian Assistance Discussions: Conversations included the potential for humanitarian aid, though India's current assistance has been limited to displaced populations and military personnel who have taken refuge in Mizoram.
- India Stance on Myanmar Crisis: India maintains a cautious stance, particularly since Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) have gained control over crucial trade routes and territories near international borders.
 - India continues to cooperate on countering **transnational crimes** such as **cybercrime**, **narcotics**, and **illegal arms**.

Myanmar Crisis

Myanmar's **military (the Tatmadaw) junta,** overthrew the democratically elected government in February 2021. This led to widespread protests and a civil disobedience movement demanding the restoration of democracy.

 In response to the junta's crackdown, opposition groups, including Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), formed the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) to resist military rule, aligning with the National Unity Government (NUG) established by ousted lawmakers. Since October 2023, fighting between the military and armed opposition groups has intensified, causing widespread displacement and humanitarian crisis.

- Almost 2.6 million people have fled their homes, and 18.6 million people, roughly 1/3 of the total population, need humanitarian assistance. Inflation and conflict have driven up the price of food and other basic necessities, leading to hunger and potential illness for 1/4 of the population.
- India maintains a balanced stance, expressing concern over the disruption of democracy while engaging with the junta to safeguard its interests. Notably, anti-junta forces have captured strategic towns near the <u>India-Myanmar border</u>, impacting crucial connectivity projects like the <u>India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway</u>.



UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

<u>Prelims</u>

Q. Consider the following pairs: (2016)

	Community sometimes mentioned in	In the affairs of
	the news	
1.	Kurd	Bangladesh
2.	Madhesi	Nepal
3.	Rohingya	Myanmar

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

(a) 1 and 2
(b) 2 only
(c) 2 and 3
(d) 3 only

Ans- (c)

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