



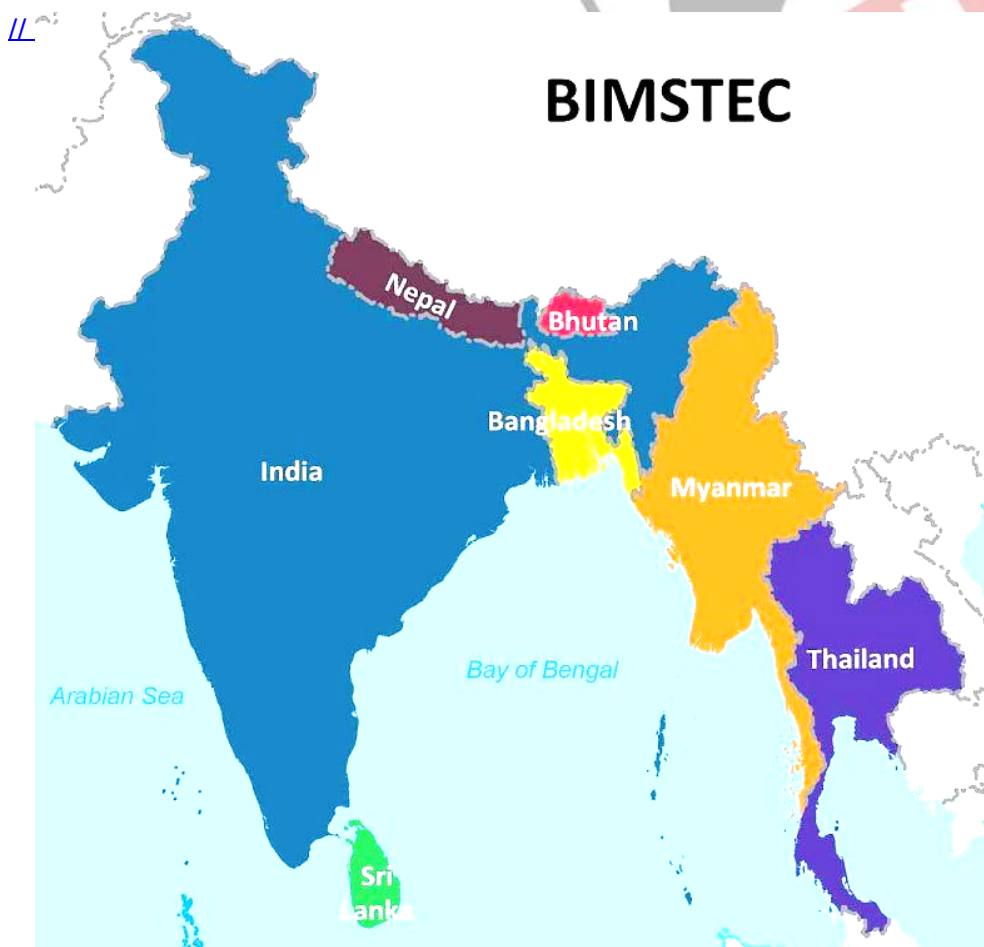
Fifth BIMSTEC Summit

For Prelims: Fifth BIMSTEC Summit, BIMSTEC, SAARC, BIMSTEC Charter, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

For Mains: Neighbourhood first policy. Gujral Doctrine, Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests, Global Groupings

Why in News?

Recently, the [Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation \(BIMSTEC\)](#) grouping's **fifth summit took place in Colombo, Sri Lanka** (Host for the Fifth Summit).



What are the Key Highlights of the Summit?

- **BIMSTEC Charter:** The signing of the **BIMSTEC Charter** was the main outcome of this summit.
 - Under this Charter, the members were expected to meet **once every two years**.
 - With the Charter, the **BIMSTEC now has an international personality**. It has an **emblem, it has a flag**.



- It has a formally **listed purpose and principles** that it is going to adhere to.
- In line with the development of the organisation into a formal structure, **the leaders of the member-countries have agreed to divide the working of the grouping into seven segments, with India providing leadership to the security pillar**.

Pillars of BIMSTEC

Sectors

Bangladesh	: Trade, Investment and Development
Bhutan	: Environment & Climate Change
India	: Security Sub-sectors: Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime, Disaster Management, Energy
Myanmar	: Agriculture and Food Security Sub-sectors: Agriculture, Fisheries & Livestock
Nepal	: People-to-People Contact Sub-sectors: Culture, Tourism, People-to-People Contact (forums of think tanks, media etc.)
Sri Lanka	: Science, Technology & Innovation (Sri Lanka) Sub-sectors: Technology, Health, Human Resource Development
Thailand	: Connectivity

- **Master Plan for Transport Connectivity:** The summit saw the declaration of the Master Plan for Transport Connectivity that would provide a **framework for regional and domestic connectivity**.
- **Other Agreements:** Member countries also signed a treaty on mutual legal assistance on criminal matters.
 - A Memorandum of Association (MoA) on the **establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility (TTF) in Colombo, Sri Lanka**.
 - India will provide the (BIMSTEC) secretariat **USD 1 million US dollars to increase its operational budget**.

What is BIMSTEC?

- The **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** is a regional organisation comprising seven Member States: five deriving from South Asia, including **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka** and two from Southeast Asia, including **Myanmar and Thailand**.
- This sub-regional organisation came into being on **6 June 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration**.
- With **21.7% of the world's population** and a combined **Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of USD 3.8 trillion**, BIMSTEC has emerged as an **influential engine of economic growth**.
- The BIMSTEC Secretariat is in **Dhaka**.
- **Institutional Mechanisms:**
 - BIMSTEC Summit
 - **Ministerial Meeting**
 - Senior Officials' Meeting
 - BIMSTEC Working Group
 - Business Forum & Economic Forum

Is BIMSTEC an Alternate of SAARC?

- The PM of India had invited **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** countries for his swearing in ceremony in 2014, **including Pakistan on the lines of his Neighbourhood first policy**.
 - The Prime Minister had also participated in the **18th SAARC summit** at Kathmandu in November 2014.
 - However, **post Uri attack** (on an Indian military base) in October 2016, India gave a renewed push for the BIMSTEC that had existed for almost two decades but been largely ignored.
- Alongside the **BRICS summit in Goa**, PM hosted an **outreach summit with BIMSTEC leaders**.
- BIMSTEC countries had supported **India's call for a boycott of the SAARC summit scheduled in Islamabad in November 2016**.
- As a result, the SAARC summit was **postponed for an indefinite period**.
- Thus, with work on several key initiatives **under SAARC stymied because of the breakdown of the relationship with Pakistan**, India began focusing on other regional groupings such as BIMSTEC and **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**.

Way Forward

- **BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement:** There is a need for finalisation of the **BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement** among the member countries.
 - As the region is facing challenges of health and economic security and stressed the need for solidarity and cooperation, the FTA will **make the Bay of Bengal a bridge of connectivity, a bridge of prosperity, a bridge of security**.
 - Apart from this, there is a necessity for **coastal shipping ecosystem and electricity grid interconnectivity**, as two of the necessary components of the evolving shape of BIMSTEC.
- **Gujral Doctrine:** India would have to counter the impression that **BIMSTEC is an India-dominated bloc**, in that context India can follow the Gujral doctrine that intends to chalk out the

effect of transactional motive in bilateral relations.

- The **Gujral Doctrine** is a **set of five principles** to guide the conduct of foreign relations with India's immediate neighbours. These principles are:
 - With neighbours like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, India **does not ask for reciprocity** but gives and accommodates what it can in good faith and trust.
 - **No South Asian country** should **allow its territory to be used against the interest of another country of the region.**
 - No country **should interfere in the internal affairs of another.**
 - All South Asian countries **must respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.**
 - They should settle all their **disputes through peaceful bilateral negotiations.**

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