BIMSTEC - A focus shift

What is the issue?

- There is a shift of focus from other regional initiatives such as SAARC to BIMSTEC.
- This shift can be attributed to the inability of SAARC to foster regional cooperation and make progress.

Why is there a shift?

- Regional cooperation under SAARC saw **no progress**, as indicated by the fact that the group has not met since 2014.
- Further, the **summit cancelled in 2016** because of India's boycott owing to Pakistan-sponsoredterror attacks in India.

What fact should be considered while dealing with BIMSTEC?

- India will have to take into account the fact that **in Asia,economics and politics have historically been deeply integrated**.
- It should not fall into the acquiescence trap.

Why BIMSTEC isa viable option?

- Regional initiatives in Asia have been defined along the tangents of **strategy and security**.
- These groupings are less inclined towards theeconomic, cultural and social lines,it may be fruitful to look towards BIMSTEC for these lines.
- **Pakistan's presence inSAARC** has been an impediment to India for its SAARC's success.
- **China's absence in BIMSTEC** means that there may be fewer obstacles hindering the achievement of the organisation's mandate.
- As the **renegotiation** of SAARC remains **unattainable**, BIMSTEC might be a viable option for India to maintain its foreign policy discourse.

Source: The Hindu

Quick Facts

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)

- BIMSTEC is a **sector-driven cooperative** sub-regionalorganization.
- It came into being in **1997** through the **Bangkok Declaration**.
- Its member States lie in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal.
- **7 Member States**: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand.
- Initially, it was an economic bloc with four Member States called **BIST-EC** (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation).
- Then it became **BIMST-EC** (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation) following the inclusion of Myanmar.
- With the admission of Nepal and Bhutan, it became BIMSTEC.

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

- It was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in **Dhaka**in the year of **1985**.
- **8 Member States**: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- **SAARC Secretariat** was set up in **Kathmandu**in 1987.
- **Objectives** of SAARC –

1. To provide a platform for the peoples of South Asia to work together in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding.
2. It aims to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life through accelerated economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region.

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