Revitalising BIMSTEC

What is the issue?

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- Bolstering physical, digital, financial, and people to people connectivity between the 7-nation BIMSTEC is key for South Asia's progress.
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- This is in line with the larger picture of India's trans-national and sub-regional initiatives for enhancing development, peace and stability.
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What is BIMSTEC?

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- Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was established in 1997.
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- It was a group of 7 littoral countries encircling the Bay of Bengal namely - Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand.
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- Notably, BIMSTEC has 5 members from SAARC and 2 from ASEAN and can potentially act as a bridge between the two.
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What is the significance?

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- In the India context, BIMSTEC stands at the very important intersection of 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East Policy'.
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- While BIMSTEC has come a very long way since its establishment, the present geo-political scenario calls for enhancing its scope and engagements further.
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- Despite its strategic significance and potential, the region remains one that is poorly inter-connected – which needs to be worked upon.
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- BIMSTEC therefore presents immense opportunities for growth and development and has particular benefits for 7 north-eastern states.
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What are the organisational reforms needed?

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- The 2016 Goa summit of the BIMSTEC (in collaboration with BRICS), and the subsequent regional business congregations have set the tone for the future.
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- The mission is to evolve a comprehensive vision for fresh, knowledge-intensive, academic, policy and industry space over the next decade.
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- Strengthening BIMSTEC Secretariat and enhancing government-to-business interface have been suggested.
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- Also, creation of a BIMSTEC fund has been mooted.
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What are reforms needed for facilitating businesses?

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- Lack of connectivity and timely availability of business information are greatest hindrances to closer economic engagement.
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- Multimodal connectivity and a speedy conclusion of the BIMSTEC FTA would have a multiplier effect on trade and investment.
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- Creating regional value chains that could feed into global value chains are vital for business integration.
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- The prospects for MSMEs are massive and these need to be augmented by encouraging competitiveness, employment generation and inclusive growth.

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- Integration of women entrepreneurs into supply chains and building innovative business models for women are essential.
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- However, the most important need is the strengthening of all modes of connectivity: physical, digital, financial and people to people.
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What is the way ahead?

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- On a backdrop of shared history, new connections have to be forged between students, entrepreneurs, artists, and elected representatives.
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- In addition, it is important to pay attention to the role of the media as an opinion shaper and influencer.
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- BIMSTEC holds catalytic potential to transform economies of member states and create a peaceful, prosperous and integrated neighbourhood.
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- The road from potential to reality will be successfully traversed only when all actors and stakeholders come together actively for the cause.
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Source: Business Line

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