

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

18TH BIMSTEC MINISTERIAL MEETING IN COLOMBO

- Recently, the Minister of External Affairs of India participated in the 18th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting in Colombo.
- India emphasised the grouping's commitment to intensify and expand areas of cooperation, especially connectivity, energy and maritime cooperation.
 - ❖ Cooperation on port facilities, ferry services, coastal shipping, grid connectivity and motor vehicles movement are key.

BIMSTEC

About:

- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organisation that was established on 06 June 1997 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration.
- Initially known as BIST-EC (Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation), the organisation is now known as BIMSTEC and comprises seven Member States with the admission of Myanmar on 22 December 1997, and Bhutan and Nepal in February 2004.
- The grouping holds annual meetings hosted by member states based on alphabetical rotation. Sri Lanka is the host nation this time.
- **Focused Sectors:**
 - ❖ Being a sector-driven grouping, cooperation within BIMSTEC had initially focused on six sectors in 1997 (trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism, and fisheries) and expanded in 2008 to incorporate agriculture, public health, poverty alleviation, counter-terrorism, environment, culture, people-to-people contact, and climate change.
 - ❖ Subsequently, following steps to rationalise and reorganise sectors and sub-sectors, cooperation was reorganised in 2021 under the following sectors and sub-sectors led by the respective Member States:

Purposes of BIMSTEC

- To create an enabling environment for rapid economic development through identification and implementation of specific cooperation projects in the already agreed areas of cooperation and such other areas that may be agreed upon by the Member States.
- To accelerate the economic growth and social progress in the Bay of Bengal region through joint endeavours in a spirit of equality and partnership.
- To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, technical and scientific fields.
- To provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional and technical spheres.
- To cooperate more effectively in joint efforts that are supportive of and complementary to national development plans of the Member States which result in tangible benefits to the people in raising their living standards, including through generating employment and improving transportation and communication infrastructure.
- To cooperate in projects that can be dealt with most productively on a regional basis among the BIMSTEC Member States and that make best use of available synergies.
- 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.
- To maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organisations with similar aims and purposes.
- To endeavour to eradicate poverty from the Bay of Bengal region.
- To establish multidimensional connectivity, promote synergy among connectivity frameworks in the region, as a key enabler to economic integration for shared prosperity.
- To promote trade and investment as a major contributing factor for fostering economic and social development in the region.

Importance of BIMSTEC

- The BIMSTEC region brings together 1.67 billion people and a combined GDP of around US \$ 2.88 trillion.

- The growing value of BIMSTEC and its attempt to generate synergy through collective efforts by member states can be understood, for three key reasons.
 - ❖ There is a greater appreciation of BIMSTEC's potential due to geographical contiguity, abundant natural and human resources, and rich historical linkages and a cultural heritage for promoting deeper cooperation in the region.
 - ❖ The region has the potential to become the epicentre of the Indo-Pacific idea — a place where the strategic interests of the major powers of East and South Asia intersect.
 - ❖ It serves as a bridge between two major high-growth centres of Asia — South and Southeast Asia.
 - Connectivity is essential to develop a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Bay of Bengal region.
 - The BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity will provide the necessary boost to connectivity.

India and BIMSTEC

- BIMSTEC connects South and Southeast Asia and also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal.
- BIMSTEC has special significance for India in a changing mental map of the region.
- India has made the Bay of Bengal integral to India's 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East' policies which can accelerate the process of regional integration. BIMSTEC matters for India and the region.
- BIMSTEC has huge potential as a natural platform for development cooperation in a rapidly changing geopolitical calculus and can leverage its unique position as a pivot in the Indo-Pacific region.
- India has implemented its promise to set up a Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies (CBS) at Nalanda University, Bihar for research on art, culture and other subjects related to the Bay of Bengal.
- The quest for economic growth and the development of the BIMSTEC region can be achieved with single-minded focus and cooperation among the member countries.
 - ❖ In this endeavour, India has a key role in accelerating regional cooperation under the BIMSTEC framework and in making it vibrant, stronger and result-oriented.

Challenges

- Persisting organisational weaknesses: Inconsistent levels of commitment and a general ambiguity regarding how to engage with other institutional actors have been the key reasons hampering the functioning of the organisation.
- Poor connectivity: It is troubled by poor road and rail connectivity, insufficient last-mile links and cumbersome customs and clearance procedures which hamper trade.
- Lack of Cohesion & coordination: Cohesion among the members has been difficult to achieve mainly because of the Rohingya refugee crisis which created bitterness between Myanmar and Bangladesh.
- This affected the working of the organisation to some extent as it could not develop a common charter.
- China's financial hegemony: As China has undertaken a massive drive to finance and build infrastructure in South and Southeast Asia through the Belt and Road Initiative in almost all BIMSTEC countries, except Bhutan and India, BIMSTEC is a new battleground in the India-China battle for dominance.
- Other issues
 - ❖ The pressing challenges that confront the region include the emergence of a dead zone with zero oxygen where no fish survive; leaching of plastic from rivers as well as the Indian Ocean; destruction of natural protection against floods such as mangroves; sea erosion; growing population pressure and industrial growth in the coastal areas and consequently, huge quantities of untreated waste flow.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- BIMSTEC might be a viable option for India to maintain its foreign policy discourse. However, India will have to take into account the fact that in Asia, economics and politics have historically been deeply integrated, and not fall into the trap.

- BIMSTEC could develop codes of conduct that preserve freedom of navigation and apply existing law of the seas regionally.
- In addition, BIMSTEC could stem the region's creeping militarisation by instituting, for instance, a Bay of Bengal Zone of Peace that seeks to limit any bellicose behaviour of extra-regional power.
- BIMSTEC leaders should reinforce their commitments and efforts in building the momentum of collaborations in the Bay of Bengal region for the security and development of all.
- BIMSTEC Nations must also collectively combat terrorism, violent extremism, transnational crime, cyber-attacks and narco-trafficking.
- The BIMSTEC Summit must create a new regional mechanism for coordinated activities on maritime issues of a transboundary nature.
- This mechanism must initiate urgent measures to strengthen fisheries management, promote sustainable fishing methods, establish protected areas and develop frameworks to prevent and manage pollution, especially industrial and agricultural waste as well as oil spills.
- There is also a need for greater scientific research on the impact of climate change in general and on fisheries in particular.
- Participatory approaches must be evolved for near-real-time stock assessment and the creation of an regional open fisheries data alliance.
 - ❖ The Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP), an inter-governmental organisation based in Chennai, is doing good work to promote sustainable fishing.
 - ❖ A Bay Of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) project is also being launched by the FAO with funding from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and others.
 - The BIMSTEC summit must express full support for both BOBP and BOBLME.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

PRADHAN MANTRI SAHAJ BIJLI HAR GHAR YOJANA – SAUBHAGYA

- Government of India has recently issued guidelines for electrification of any leftover un-electrified households identified before 31.03.2019 prior to Saubhagya for covering these under Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS).

About Saubhagya Scheme

- It was launched in October, 2017 with the objective to achieve universal household electrification by providing electricity connections to all un-electrified households in rural areas and all poor households in urban areas in the country.
- It is one of the world's biggest universal electrification initiatives with collaborative and concerted efforts of the Centre and the States.
- It is a concurrent program to Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY).
- Rural Electrification Corporation Limited (REC) is the nodal agency for the operationalization of the scheme throughout the country.

Goal:

- To achieve Universal Household Electrification in the country by establishing last-mile connectivity and delivering power to all un-electrified rural families and poor urban households.

Salient Features:

- The prospective beneficiary households for free connection would be identified using Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) 2011 data.
 - ❖ Households not found eligible as per SECC data, would also be provided electricity connections on payment of Rs 500 recoverable in 10 instalments through electricity bills.
- All DISCOMs including Private Sector DISCOMs, State Power Departments and RE Cooperative Societies are eligible for financial assistance.
- Dedicated web portal for SAUBHAGYA has been developed to capture the information and progress of household electrification.

Progress

- Under the scheme, as on 31.03.2019, all households were reported electrified by the States, except 18,734 households in Left Wing Extremist (LWE) affected areas of Chhattisgarh.
- Subsequently, seven States namely Assam, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Manipur, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh reported that around 19.09 lakh un-electrified households,

identified before 31.03.2019, which were unwilling earlier, have later on expressed willingness to get electricity connections.

- All the States and Union Territories (UTs) have signed MoUs with the Central Government to ensure 24x7 power supply to all households, industrial & commercial consumers and adequate supply of power to agricultural consumers w.e.f. 1st April, 2019 onwards.

Other Similar initiatives

DeenDayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY):

- Ministry: Ministry of Power.
- Focus: On strengthening & augmentation the existing infrastructure and metering of existing feeders/distribution transformers to improve the quality and reliability of power supply in rural areas.
- **Objectives:**
 - ❖ To provide electrification to all villages
 - ❖ Feeder separation to ensure sufficient power to farmers and regular supply to other consumers
 - ❖ Improvement of Sub-transmission and distribution network to improve the quality and reliability of the supply
 - ❖ Metering to reduce the losses
- "Integrated Power Development Scheme" (IPDS):
 - ❖ Ministry of Power, Government of India notified IPDS on 3rd December'14 with the following components:
 - Strengthening of sub-transmission and distribution networks in the urban areas.
 - Metering of distribution transformers/feeders/consumers in the urban areas.
 - Schemes for Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and IT enablement of balanced urban towns are also included under IPDS. The scope of IT enablement has been extended to all 4041 towns as per Census 2011.
 - All Discoms will be eligible for financial assistance under the scheme.

Restructured Accelerated Power Development and Reforms Programme (R-APDRP):

- It was launched with a focus on the establishment of baseline data, fixation of accountability, reduction of AT&C losses up to 15% level through strengthening & up-gradation of Sub Transmission and Distribution network and adoption of Information Technology during XI Plan.

Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY):

- The Ministry of Power, GoI launched Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY) which was approved by the Union Cabinet on 5th November 2015. The scheme envisages:
 - Financial Turnaround
 - Operational improvement
 - Reduction of cost of generation of power
 - Development of Renewable Energy
 - Energy efficiency & conservation

Conclusion

- While the set objectives of the scheme have been achieved, team SAUBHAGYA has continued its work of providing a 24x7 quality power supply to all.
- All states have been requested to launch special campaigns in their respective states to identify any left out un-electrified households and subsequently provide electricity connections to them.
 - ❖ A dedicated toll-free helpline has also been launched for that purpose.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM

1. One-Horned Rhino

- The Rhino population in Kaziranga National Park of Assam increases by 200 according to the latest census.
 - ❖ The population was 2413 in 2018 now it is 200 more which is a huge achievement for the future of Assam Wildlife in the country.

About Indian One-Horned Rhino

- The greater one-horned rhino (or "Indian rhino") is the largest of the rhino species.

Physical Appearance

- ❖ Indian Rhinos are brownish-grey in colour and are hairless.
- ❖ They have knobby skin that appears to be armour-plated. A single horn sits on top of their snout, and their upper lip is semi-prehensile.
- ❖ The greater one-horned rhino is identified by a single black horn about 8-25 inches long and a grey-brown hide with skin folds, which gives it an armour-plated appearance.

Diet : They primarily graze, with a diet consisting almost entirely of grasses as well as leaves, branches of shrubs and trees, fruit, and aquatic plants.

Habitat:

- ❖ It is confined to the tall grasslands and forests in the foothills of the Himalayas.
- ❖ The Great one-horned rhino is commonly found in Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and in Assam, India.
- **Conservation Status:** Greater One-Horned Rhinos (*Rhinoceros unicornis*): Vulnerable.

Conservation Efforts by India

- The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has launched a National Conservation Strategy for Indian One-Horned Rhino and the conservation initiatives for rhino has also enriched the grassland management which helps in reducing the negative impacts of climate change through carbon sequestration.
- New Delhi Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019: Signed by India, Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia to conserve and protect the rhinos.
- Project to create DNA profiles of all rhinos by the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- Indian Rhino Vision 2020: It is a unique programme where the government partnered international, national and local organisations for the conservation of the rhinos.
 - ❖ Under it, Manas has received a total of 22 rhinos from other protected areas.
- The Indian and Nepalese governments have taken major steps toward Indian Rhinoceros conservation with the help of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

2. ANNUAL FRONTIER REPORT 2022

- The UNEP Annual Frontier Report 2022 was released recently.

About

- The United Nations Frontier Report 2022 ranks 61 cities in total, including 13 from South Asia, 10 from Europe, 10 from West Asia, 11 from East Asia, South East Asia and the Pacific, 7 from Africa, 6 from North America and 4 from Latin America
- It was titled 'Noise, Blazes and Mismatches'.

Key Highlights of the Report

- Dhaka has been ranked as the noisiest city in the world which is followed by Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh.
- Five Indian cities have been ranked in this list of being among the noisiest cities of the world which are Asansol, Jaipur, Kolkata, New Delhi, and Moradabad.
- Irbid, Jordan has been ranked as the world's quietest city and it is followed by Lyon, France, and Madri

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Q1. Account for the various impediments which prevent India from achieving 'atmanirbharta' in defence. Suggest steps to overcome them and achieve strategic autonomy in key defence technologies. (250 words)

Introduction

Defence indigenisation has remained the inner calling of a nation, which has the third largest Army, is the eighth largest military spender and has emerged as the largest importer of weapon systems and platforms in the world. As India inches to achieve its rightful strategic autonomy, it needs to do much more in planting the seeds for a commercially viable and technologically robust indigenous defence industrial base. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), in 2019, India became the third-largest defence spender in the world

Body

Challenges which prevent India from achieving 'Aatmanirbharta' in defence

- Lack of Defence Manufacturing base in India
- Primarily driven by Government ordnance factories and poor private participation

- The public sector (DPSUs/OFs) by far has enjoyed the preferred categorization, particularly for big ticket purchases, when considering the Indian route, despite its poor track record as regards time and cost overruns, inefficiencies and poor financial performance.
- The defence industry per-se being a capital intensive industry with high risks on investments leaves very few private players in the arena. DPSUs, on the other hand, have not done much to promote proficient business practices by involving the industry and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- The report of the 33rd Standing Committee on Defence – Indigenization of Defence Production: Public Private Partnership was highly critical of the steps taken by the government to promote indigenization
- High costs and involved and lack of assured market
- Poor technological transfer by foreign companies
- Lack of Data
 - Assessment of Degree of Indigenisation: As of today, no scientific system is in place to assess the extent/ level of indigenisation achieved by defence production entities in the country.
 - Bureaucratic delay and licensing issues: there is still no ease of doing business in defence industry.: Investment in the defence sector is subject to compliance with the licensing requirements stipulated by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP).

Measures needed to be Aatmanirbhar in Defence sector

- To boost indigenization, DRDO needs to be given more autonomy like space and atomic energy departments
- With opening up of 100% FDI in defence sector, giving private players an opportunity would bring in the money as well as competition to the Defence PSUs.
- Setting up of the planned defence industrial corridors.
- Robust Defence Diplomacy, for which a cadre of defence diplomats should be created so that new co-ordination with world can bring new idea and innovations.
- Setting up of a Defence Export Organization to promote export of defence equipments.
- Instituting an Independent Audit addressing issues of inefficiency and accountability, this shall help in keeping the flow of ideas and innovation.
- Setting up an aerospace university, can help in bringing new ideas and innovations

Way Forward

- Defence offset policies need better monitoring, removing unnecessary restrictions and linking defence offsets with offset in civil sector. That should be encouraged.
- To boost indigenization, the Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) needs to be given more autonomy like space and atomic energy departments.
- Even playing field should be created between the Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and the private sector companies.
- Indian defence PSUs and ordnance factories have a lot of potential, they need to be “revived, revitalised and made a lot more dynamic”.
- Establishing courses on defence production across universities and creating job opportunities for the graduates.
- The government needs to expedite the setting up a professional defence procurement agency.
- Meeting the objectives of defence exports, encouraging innovation, streamlining procurements will require robust defence diplomacy. A cadre of defence diplomats should be created to address these issues.
- The country needs an elaborate ecosystem of innovation of which defence innovation can be a part.

Conclusion

Self-reliance is a major corner-stone on which the military capability of any nation rests. Indigenous defence production is an essential capability to provide strategic independence to a nation, thus making exponential additions to national security through round-the-clock defence preparedness. Neighbours believe in its nuclear doctrine through effective confidence building measures.

DAILY QUIZ

Q1. Arrange the following hills from East to West direction:

1. Garo Hills

2. Khasi Hills
3. Jaintia Hills

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

- (a) 1-2-3
- (b) 2-3-1
- (c) **3-2-1**
- (d) 3-1-2

Q2. Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana – Saubhagya?

1. It is a concurrent program to Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana' (DDUGJY).
2. The beneficiaries for free electricity connections would be identified using Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 data.
3. Under Saubhagya, only Public Sector DISCOMs are eligible for financial assistance

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Q3. Great one-horned rhino is commonly found in which of the following countries ?

1. Nepal
2. Bhutan
3. Pakistan
4. India

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 4 only
- (c) 1 and 2 only
- (d) **1,2,3 and 4**

Q4. Recently, "Project Chunauti" was seen in the news. What is it related to?

- (a) e-Governance project to maintain rural land records
- (b) Technology for improved provisioning of judicial services to citizens
- (c) **Start-up challenge**
- (d) Electronic services to the Companies registered under the Companies Act

Q5. With reference to the Lithium-ion Batteries, consider the following statements:

1. Metallic lithium is used in these rechargeable batteries.
2. Lithium ions move from the negative electrode to the positive electrode during discharge and vice-versa while charging.

Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?

- (a) None
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1 and 2 only
- (d) **only 1**