

1. Do you think BIMSTEC has the real potential to transform the collective future of South Asia? Examine. What are the challenges therein? Discuss.

Introduction

The South Asian region covers roughly three percent of the world's total land area and is home to around 21 percent of the population. The region has a diverse socioeconomic setup, including major economic powers such as India. In this regard, BIMSTEC comprises Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, and is intended to be a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia.

Body

- Of late the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is receiving sincere attention from its member countries as an organisation that has the potential to transform the region's political and economic future.
- Consequently, BIMSTEC is seen to have a real potential to transform the collective future of south asia due to the following factors:
- In view of the continued failure of SAARC to provide a platform for south asian integration, BIMSTEC has gained more favour as the preferred platform for regional cooperation in South Asia.
- The general belief is that BIMSTEC does not have the limitations that the India-Pakistan conflict imposes on SAARC; therefore, it can be a transformative institutional mechanism for regional cooperation.
- Further, One of the reasons for BIMSTEC's popularity is that the member countries have generally cordial relationships, something patently missing among the SAARC countries.
- BIMSTEC's primary focus is on economic and technical cooperation among the countries of South Asia and SouthEast Asia. So far, 14 sectors have been identified for enhancing regional cooperation among the member countries.
- BIMSTEC's major strength comes from the fact that it includes two influential regional powers: Thailand and India. This adds to the comfort of smaller neighbours by reducing the fear of dominance by one big power. Further, it augurs well with India's 'Act East' and 'Neighbourhood First' Policies.
- The region has countries with the fastest-growing economies in the world. The combined GDP in the region is more than US\$3 trillion and will likely grow further. Trade among the BIMSTEC member countries reached six percent in just a decade, while in SAARC, it has remained around five percent since its inception.
- A landmark achievement for BIMSTEC was the establishment of a permanent secretariat in Dhaka. Further, among the member countries, Myanmar's and Nepal's intra-BIMSTEC trade is very high.
- Under BIMSTEC, cooperation against terrorism has been formalized under a Joint Working Group for Counter-terrorism and Transnational Crime which has advanced cooperation in the critical areas of intelligence sharing,

combating the financing of terrorism, drug trafficking and cooperation on countering radicalization.

Despite the many successes and promises of BIMSTEC, however, some challenges remain, like:

- The infrequency of the BIMSTEC summits, the highest decision-making body of the organisation. In its 20 years of existence, the BIMSTEC summit has taken place only thrice. The secretariat faces a severe resource crunch, both in terms of money and manpower, which has adversely affected its performance.
- Moreover, the delay in the adoption of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), a framework that was agreed upon in 2004, fuels doubts about BIMSTEC's efficacy.
- The lack of leadership is also seen as a major drawback. In the past few years, this concern has been addressed as India has shown increased interest in the grouping. India's initiatives have resulted in some important developments, including the setting up of the BIMSTEC Energy Centre in Bengaluru and the BIMSTEC Business Council.
- Region lacks physical connectivity- The trilateral highway connecting India-Myanmar-Thailand has been a non-starter. Further, lack of good infrastructure has acted as a barrier to trade by raising cost and time.

To maintain the momentum and to strengthen BIMSTEC as a sustainable platform for regional cooperation, the following steps can be considered:

- Consistency in the frequency of the summits to ensure regularity in decision-making as well as empowering BIMSTEC to be a platform for dispute resolution among member countries.
- Regular interaction, exchanges, and coordination among ports of the BIMSTEC region will play a role in enlarging trade and commerce, as well as promoting coastal shipping.
- Sharing land and maritime borders with BIMSTEC countries, India should expedite growth in connectivity (through road, rail, maritime and air) within BIMSTEC. For example, it should develop well-connected quality ports such as a deep-sea container terminal in Sri Lanka, in addition to the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway.
- Simultaneously, focusing on trade facilitation measures such as simplification and harmonization of trade procedures, setting regional single windows for custom clearance, recognition of custom transit documents, and proper coordination between border authorities will facilitate expansion of trade in BIMSTEC.

Conclusion

BIMSTEC provides the Bay of Bengal nations an opportunity to work together to create a common space for peace and development. With 22% of the world's population and a GDP of \$2.5 trillion, BIMSTEC can become one of the world's strongest political and economic unions.

2. How is India protecting her economic and strategic interest in an era of emerging subregionalism.

Introduction

India is today a member of several trans-regional, regional and sub-regional groupings. On the one hand, India today sees global and regional multilateral mechanisms as platforms to engage with the outside world to meet the expectations from a rising power. On the other hand, India needs global and regional multilateral organisations to meet its own rising aspirations.

Body

- The paradox of India's rise is that while there is a clear positive trend in its role in global governance, regional governance remains locked in geopolitics. South Asia is a region where despite the existence of a pan-South Asian organisation SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) for over three decades, it is yet to implement a single all SAARC project.
- At the same time, there has been a rise of global sub regional groupings coupled with slowdown in world economic growth rate which are making things challenging for India in this growing trend towards de-globalisation.
- 'Regional cooperation', is a term coined not too long ago to denote joint action and interaction by geographically contiguous countries with common cultural identities to address complex goals such as reducing poverty, promoting peace and security and achieving sustainable development.
- Consequently, Sub Regionalism might simply be the right size and level of economic governance as states lose power 'upwards' to the 'super-region', and 'downwards' to the global economy.
- Growth triangles and similar forms of sub-regional economic zones are usually constructed around partnerships between private actors and a range of public actors at both national and sub-national levels. Some of the most well-known cases include (1) the Indonesia–Malaysia–Singapore Growth Triangle (IMS-GT); (2) the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT).
- On the one hand, India is building South Asia regionalism through a "bottom-up" approach with innovative ideas such as sub-regionalism. Given its centrality in South Asia, there is a considered opinion that regionalism cannot grow without India's active support.
- The first 'collaborative sub-regionalism' was experimented with South Asia Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ) in 1997 involving four SAARC nations

(Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) with the aim to enhance 'regional solidarity and promoting overall development within SAARC' with an emphasis on project-based development.

- In 2000, the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) programme in the SAGQ was launched with assistance from Asian Development Bank (ADB) with six priority sectors that included transport, energy and power, tourism, environment, trade, investment, and private sector cooperation, and information and communication technology.
- India further pushed its eastward drive when it set up another sub-regional grouping with the mainland Southeast Asian nations. In 2000, India along with five of the Mekong nations (Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam) established the Mekong–Ganga Cooperation (MGC).
- The MGC emphasised cooperation in the field of tourism, culture, education, and transportation linkages. In the same year, India and South Africa together launched the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) along with Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Yemen, Tanzania, Madagascar and Mozambique.
- BIMSTEC is another sub regional grouping which is being propounded as a counter to SAARC by India to safeguard its interests in eastern south asia. Further, it would help in overcoming the impasse due to Pakistan in south asian collaboration.
- At the sub-regional level, the government further strengthened groupings such as the BIMSTEC, the SESEC/BBIN and the MGC as part of the Act East policy with the aim to accelerate the integration process in the region. For instance, India pledged to contribute 32 per cent of the annual expenditure on BIMSTEC's permanent secretariat in Dhaka.
- Government's vision of the Indian Ocean region was outlined in 2015 in the acronym SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region). Further, India has ambitions of strengthening subregional mechanisms for maritime cooperation and sought the involvement of 'Mauritius, Seychelles and other nations in the region' to join the India-Sri Lanka-Maldives trilateral initiative.

Conclusion

Thus it can be seen that to tackle the emerging subregional challenges India is increasingly taking the lead to improve sub regional governance in key areas including socio-economic development, maritime, energy, water, cyber, space and security. India's various capacity-building efforts in South Asia, the Mekong region, and in the island nations of the Indian Ocean contributes to good sub regional governance.

3. How is China posing challenges in India's engagement with the neighbours? What measures have been taken to instill confidence amongst India's immediate neighbours.

Introduction

India has enjoyed substantial regional influence across South Asia due to its size, comparative economic might, and historical and cultural relevance to the region.

But over the past decade, China has become a significant economic partner to countries throughout the region, forging particularly strong ties with smaller states through trade, diplomacy, aid, and investment.

China has adopted a policy aimed at enhancing the development options of its neighbours as well as promoting new lines of communication or corridors with its southwestern periphery. Much of this impetus has been provided by the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) – a grand connectivity plan that envisions a network of states economically linked to China through a variety of commercial-financial relationships and industrial projects

Body

China posing challenges in India's engagement with the neighbours.

- India's position is challenged by Chinese push into the neighbourhood through the BRI.
- China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) — an integral component of BRI—is a strategic threat to India. The CPEC is not seen just an economic project but also a security-centric one, especially when the infrastructure can be used for military purposes. Gwadar port is a prime example of such dual-use infrastructure.
- China steps up its engagement with the region largely through its “Belt and Road Initiative”. It can marshal extensive resources on initiatives such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank that will likely outpace other financial sources.
- Chinese support for a port, airport, and cricket stadium in Hambantota, and other infrastructure projects revealed an increasingly close relationship between the two countries.
- In Maldives President Abdulla Yameen imposed a state of emergency, against India's advice. It is not difficult to figure out that China's backing is giving Yameen the confidence to snub India.
- China helped K.P. Oli get elected by brokering an alliance of the left parties to take on the pro-India Nepalese Congress.

Measures taken to instill confidence amongst India's immediate neighbours

- Just as Beijing's engagement with India's neighbours increases the status and bargaining position of these smaller states vis-à-vis India, New Delhi too

engages with many South East Asian states who seek to hedge their dependence on China by developing more economic and geopolitical options.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has doubled down on his outreach across South Asia, stressing infrastructure development, people-to-people connectivity, and a “lift all boats” approach to help India’s neighbors gain from its own rise.
- India has generated lots of good will in neighbourhood. For instance Land Boundary Agreement between India and Bangladesh.
- The allocation of India’s foreign aid prioritizes Bhutan, demonstrating the special economic relationship that India and Bhutan share.
- Afghanistan is also a significant recipient of Indian aid.

Conclusion

Nearly all of India’s neighbours have expressed a preference for (i) non-alignment or strategic autonomy as a guiding principle in their foreign relations; (ii) multi-directional economic engagement with India, China, the US, Japan and other powers; and (iii) sensitivity towards India including publicly disavowing any move towards offering military facilities or bases to external powers and thus reassuring India on its vital interests.

With an unresolved border and a contentious history, India often views China’s activities in the South Asia neighborhood warily. Yet China’s and India’s efforts in South Asia can overlap, such as in the development of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar economic corridor, opening up new opportunities for constructive cooperation. India’s “Act East” policy aims to facilitate commerce, culture, and connectivity throughout Southeast Asia, an area that also captures China’s focus. The two countries’ efforts will likely be complementary since the region’s infrastructure needs are so pressing and require trillions of dollars in capital.

4. What are India’s interests in Latin America? Have we been able to tap the full potential of engagements with the Latin American world? Critically examine.

Introduction

Latin America is generally understood to consist of the entire continent of South America in addition to Mexico, Central America, and the islands of the Caribbean whose inhabitants speak a Romance language such as Spanish, Portuguese, and French.

Body

India’s interests in Latin America

Economic

- Latin America is also very rich in minerals such as copper, lithium, iron ore, gold and silver. It gives India an opportunity to increase investments for their extraction as well as for their imports at cheaper rates.
- India's exports to Latin America increased by 9.6% in 2018-19 (April to March) reaching \$13.16 billion from \$12 billion in 2017-18.

Strategic

- The region is very important for India in order to achieve its global ambitions such as in order to pursue its membership of the UNSC, the NSG and at various other negotiations like climate change, terrorism, trade, etc
- India is cooperating with Brazil at platforms like BRICS, IBSA which has provided an alternative platform for developing countries and reduces their dependence on existing institutions controlled by west.

Energy security

- Currently India sources 15% of its crude oil from Latin America countries.
- Latin America is also an important partner in the India led International Solar Alliance.

Food security

- Latin America region is five times that of India and only has half as much population.
- India is importing pulses and oil seeds from many of African and Southeast Asian countries at very high costs.

We have not been able to tap the full potential of engagements with the Latin American world

- India has good relations with countries like Brazil, Mexico, Chile but other countries lag behind.
- Though trade in commodities continues to grow and has reached \$46 billion in 2012-13, but it is nothing compared to the Chinese trade of \$250 billion with the region which is set to double itself in the next 10 years
- Rivalries between countries like Brazil and Argentina for regional dominance is also affecting India's relations with the region. For instance while India and Brazil are part of the G4 seeking the UNSC membership, Argentina is part of the coffee club

We have been able to tap the full potential of engagements with the Latin American world

- There has been an upward swing in the relations between India and Mexico after PM Narendra Modi's visit to Mexico in June 2016, when both countries decided to upgrade bilateral relations to the level of "strategic partnership."
- After the US, India is Mexico's largest supplier of automobiles.
- Brazil has historically been the cornerstone of India's relations with Latin America.
- The entry of Indian generic pharmaceuticals in Latin America over the last two decades has also put pressure on local and multinational companies to reduce their prices and increase the proportion of generic medicines.
- Latin American firms have invested about a billion dollars in India in areas such as soft drinks, multiplexes, theme parks, and auto parts. Latin American software firms have also established development and delivery centres in India, employing over a thousand Indian software engineers.
- Latin America has also emerged as a key contributor to India's energy security. India now imports 20% of its crude oil from Brazil, Columbia, Mexico and Venezuela.
- In 2012, India overtook China as the largest Asian buyer of Venezuelan oil. India also constitutes one of the largest suppliers of IT services to Latin America, with over 35,000 Latin Americans now employed in Indian IT companies operating in the region.
- New Delhi is also actively promoting official policies intended to further expand Indian IT services in Latin America.

Conclusion

President Ram Nath Kovind's trip to Suriname and Cuba and Vice President Venkaiah Naidu's trip to Guatemala, Panama and Peru this year have tried to fill the gap. But much more dialogue needs to be conducted.

India should increase its diplomatic presence in the region, promote Latin American studies, invest in shipping industries, and conclude PTAs and FTAs at the earliest with different countries.

But most importantly, it should remove the psychological barriers that have stopped it from achieving full potential in the relationship.

5. How is India placed in Africa vis a vis China? What are the potentials and challenges for India in the African continent? Discuss.

Introduction

African continent is increasingly becoming the next theatre of global attraction and competition because of natural resources, demography and socio-economic development. Both India and China are investing in the continent to reap the benefits.

Body**India in Africa vis a vis China:**

- Development strategy: India see African countries as partners in development as different from China which aims for economic exploitation of the continent with a colonial mindset and use strategies like debt trap.
- Focus on culture and soft power: China's sole agenda is economic where as India integrates it with soft power development as well as cultural aspects.
- Employment: China employ Chinese workers instead of giving employment to locals whereas India is focused on empowerment and employment of locals as well.
- Sustainable development: India is concerned about environmental aspect as well which is ignored by China.
- Chinese loans come with strict conditions that only Chinese technology will be utilized where as India works on joint implementation and technology transfer.
- India teams up with countries of similar objectives and plans development projects like Asia-Africa growth corridor with Japan.

Chinese trade with African countries stands at \$220billion compared to around \$70 billion of India.

However, with a sustainable model, India is at the forefront of foreign investments in Africa and surpass China in many countries. E.g. Indian corporations have attained near complete control of the local oil and natural gas industry in Sudan, Indian Essar group in Zimbabwe.

Potential:

- Resource rich region: Africa has untapped natural resources and provide eough opportunity for Indian investment.
- Soft power: India maintains healthy relations with almost every African country which can be utilized to make favourable trade deals as well as increase the people-people connect.
- Reform in global institutions- India's ambition to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council makes it imperative that it engages with all 54 countries of the continent.
- Convergence of interest- Two partners are aligned on the outstanding issues at the World Trade Organization (WTO), UN and other multilateral forums which can be utilized.
- India has opportunities in exports of Pharmaceutical Products, Automobiles, Textiles and more importantly people in a fast-growing Africa.
- Africa being an oil rich continent can take the pressure of Indian dependence on west Asia on oil.

- India has numerous advantages, including proximity, a common language, popularity of Indian culture, and the appeal of democracy.

Challenges:

- Political instability: Political instability in number of African Nation may impact India's long-term investment opportunities. E.g. South Sudan experiencing civil war since 2013(civil unrest in 2019), Algeria protests.
- Terrorism in Africa: There has been an extraordinary increase in terrorist attacks by extremists connected to al-Qaida and ISIS across Africa over the recent years.
- Attacks on Africans in India: There has been a spate of assaults on Africans based in India. It will generate a negative image of India in Africa and may impact on century-old ties with the continent.
- Lack of Coordination between Indian State and its businesses in Africa and the role of India Inc. is limited while drafting policies. This limits the strengths of both actors that can be leveraged.
- Financial Limitations: India cannot compete with China or US vis a vis cheque book diplomacy.
- China's strong presence in the continent: China is a strong competitor for India in Africa. Africa China trade amounts to US\$220 billion. China even built up its first overseas military base in Djibouti.

Conclusion

While China's aggressive economic approach has caused it to achieve more influence in Africa than any other country, its dominance is slowly being impeded by India's growing involvement in the region. Instead of cut throat competition, both the countries have to maintain a balance integrating the development plans. India has to build on goodwill and soft power and utilize on its agenda of Joint development contrasting China.