

BIMSTEC: BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION: SWOT ANALYSIS FROM INDIAN PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization comprising seven member states: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Multi-sectoral cooperation can be seen in the case of BIMSTEC, which is the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. Thus, this paper aims to analyze a comprehensive SWOT analysis of BIMSTEC based on the Indian perspective. They cover India's strategic considerations related to geopolitics, economic cooperation, energy security, and soft power. Finally, the literature review reveals that the tag is inclined towards the advancement of technology, the need for strong institutional frameworks, and competent ways of eradicating economic imbalance among the member nations. Based on the study, it can be concluded that there are inherent opportunities for cooperation within BIMSTEC, but the issues of geopolitical competition, problems with the organization's management, and political unpredictability should be solved. Finally, the paper provides suggestions to make BIMSTEC a more effective organization with a better institutional basis to support members, inclusive growth for the region's people, better connectivity, optimum use of energy resources, and target environmental conservation. Therefore, India has a significant opportunity to ensure turning BIMSTEC into an active and efficient organization, which will help to provide stability, security, and further developments in the South Asian region in the Bay of Bengal.

Keywords: BIMSTEC, Geopolitical Influence, Economic Integration, Regional Cooperation, Energy Security, Maritime Security, and Technological Advancement

INTRODUCTION

BIMSTEC is an acronym for the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation with its member states requiring to enhance economic and technical cooperation among their countries. Abbreviated for Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thai bi-state cooperation, BIMSTEC aims at integrating South and Southeast Asia, provided by the Bay of Bengal. BIMSTEC was established in 1997 and is divided into several sectors that include trade, investment, energy, transport, tourism, and fisheries to foster the integration process at the regional level comprehensively. India has a strategic interest in BIMSTEC because it lies within its neighborhood, has a huge economic prospect, and checks the hegemonic power of China in the region. As the following sections lay out, this paper is a BIMSTEC SWOT analysis of the organization from an Indian perspective. It also specifically looks at the strategic stakes in India and makes suggestions for boosting the efficacy of BIMSTEC.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To Examine BIMSTEC's Evolution: Analyzing the Level of Historical Formation of BIMSTEC as a Important Actor for Cooperation.
- To Assess India's Role and Interests: Analyzing the function, capability and positioning of India in BIMSTEC and in light of the economical, political and security framework of the BIMSTEC.
- To Evaluate Achievements and Challenges: Assessing BIMSTEC's academic developments on the sectors for cooperation and connectivity and the methods to confront systematically challenges collectively.

- **To Identify Future Prospects and Recommendations:** In order to analyze the objectives of the development of the BIMSTEC's performance, which includes the measures and policies towards the enhancement of integration and cooperation in the aforementioned organization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study uses documentary analysis and case study research designs due to their appropriateness for a qualitative study. Official documents, reports, and BIMSTEC member states' statements, as well as India's activities and roles, will be primary data sources. The secondary data will be gathered from research articles, research policy papers, and reports published by international organizations to understand in detail BIMSTEC's formation, its progress, its problems, and its potential for the future. The document analysis will also include a reading and interpretative description of how the periodical primary documentary sources written in the English language could be used to trace the development of BIMSTEC and India within the context of that organization. That will entail an evaluation of concrete cases to highlight the effectiveness and efficiency of given strategies as well as the problems faced. There is always value in adopting both an interpretive and quantitative approach, as it avoids a skewed view of the system and associates the dynamics of BIMSTEC and India's strategic interests with the quantitative data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chaudhury and Chatterji (2019) discussed the strategic importance of the Bay of Bengal, analyzing how BIMSTEC can contribute to improving relations between the member countries and improving regional connectivity and security. They opine that the BOB is endowed with a focal position linking the important markets in South Asia and thus holds great prospects for the trade and development dynamics necessary to integrate the region. Bhowmick and Basu (2020) identify the role of technology in the development of BIMSTEC, especially within the 4th Industrial Revolution. They stress the importance of implementing ICT in BIMSTEC countries and improving the nations' technology standards to be competitive in the international market. This study thereby called for the leadership role of Sri Lanka in the development of technology within BIMSTEC due to its central location in the Indian Ocean. Contemporary challenges and opportunities for the reintegration of trade cooperation in BIMSTEC are the subject of the article by Marwah et al. (2022), which is devoted to the political economy of trade in the region. Some of them focus on the difference in economic capacities within the member countries and on the necessity of defining fairer trade policies to reach inclusionary progress. The study also raises the concern of how factors such as conflict, for instance, between India and China affect the functionality of BIMSTEC. There is a broad literature on BIMSTEC's formation and growth, and Bhatia's (2017) study is one of the most exhaustive that covers the group's formation process. He also states that despite the progress BIMSTEC has achieved in the paradigm of regional integration, there are problems associated with the locus of organizational issues and political volatility in member countries. According to Bhatia, there is a required increase in the institutionalism of measures to improve the efficiency of BIMSTEC. Necessary homogenous correlations are computed by Hossain (2013) with the help of the Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) simulation model, depending on the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area (FTA) liberalization impacts. It indicates that an FTA will have very positive implications for the volume of trade among the various countries since it scales down the constraints on trade. But he has also pointed out that these benefits are unlikely to be distributed equally, meaning that policies are required to target the shortfall. These studies, in aggregate, thus establish that the BIMSTEC region is beset with a complex mix of problems and prospects. The strategies identify the role of technology, economic integration, and strong institutions for the success of the organization. Scholars of foreign policy also mention the geopolitical context as a key determinant of BIMSTEC's performance; that is why it is important not only for member countries but for all partners to develop cooperation strategies successfully.

SWOT ANALYSIS OF BIMSTEC

1. STRENGTHS

Geopolitical Importance: Geographically, BIMSTEC is formulated such that it is centrally located in the Bay of Bengal and India occupies the most relevant place within it. The Bay of Bengal is a strategic water channel since it links South and Southeast Asia as a trade and energy corridor. The significance of this region cannot be stressed more, especially for India, which seeks to protect its naval power and expand its influence in the Indian Pacific region.

Strategic Maritime Routes: The Bay of Bengal is strategically important due to the sea lines of communication (SLOCs), which are connections between global trade and energy supply. About 95 percent of the forex traded volume and 68 percent by value are seaborne, and the routes are served by the Bay of Bengal. This is why BIMSTEC is so crucial for India, as it aims to guarantee the safety of these vital sea communication routes.

Example: Sagarmala Project

Some of the latest initiatives that India has undertaken are examples of how it is trying to capitalize on its geographical position; for instance, the Sagarmala Project, which focuses on the development of port cities. Speaking of the goal of the project, it is worth mentioning that the project relates to the development of ports, increasing their capacity and connectivity to enhance economic growth in India's coastal areas. Through BIMSTEC, India may engage with the member states to improve maritime connectivity, support regional trade, and secure the A UNIX Securities of the strategic sea routes.

Economic Integration: Unlike other regional organizations, BIMSTEC is multi-sectoral, a fact that corresponds with India's top economic agendas, such as free and unfettered market access and opportunities for India's commercial sector. Thus, the focus on trade, investment, energy, transport, tourism, technology, and the fishing industry leads this organization to develop a strong foundation for regional economic integration.

Trade and Investment: The multipolarity of BIMSTEC is also based on achieving stronger relations to build a favorable environment for trade and investment to support economic growth and development in the region. Whichever category is being considered, India's vast and growing market helps to drive the region's integration by offering customers the goods and services exported by other BIMSTEC countries. India's BIMSTEC trade during the years 2020–21 was approximately USD 40 billion. 46 billion, which can illustrate the fact that the countries in the region have become economically entwined.

Example: The BIMSTEC Free Trade Area is without doubt one of the significant variables in the regional community as a whole.

The current vision of the proposed FTA to be established within BIMSTEC member nations and organizations is to minimize trade restrictions. Thus, using the FTA, India can expect to increase the volumes of trade, the variety of markets, and investment prospects. Demonstrate the envisaged economic goals and priorities of India's foreign policy regarding the strengthening of regional trade and economic cooperation.

Countering China's Influence: Thus, BIMSTEC plays a crucial role as a strategic counterpoint to China's increasing assertiveness in the South Asian and IOR regions. Building closer relationships with BIMSTEC countries would go a long way toward enhancing regional integration and ensuring the confrontation of similar security and developmental issues, thus ensuring a check on China's hegemony.

Geopolitical Rivalry: China's BRI has expanded its influence in the South Asian and IOR states, raising strategic concerns about containment and economic deviation. Thus, BIMSTEC serves India as an opportunity to address these challenges by advancing competing development agendas and consolidating the mechanics of cooperation.

Example: India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway

The component that is of interest in this case is the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, which is an infrastructure project dedicated to improving connectivity and trade between South and Southeast Asia. Besides enhancing economic cooperation, this plan can also be considered a countermeasure against China's dominant influence. Thus, through BIMSTEC-enhancing infrastructural connections, India can present practical options for free Chinese initiatives and demonstrate its presidency in regional advancement.

Cultural and historical ties: India enjoys very old bilateral relations and partnerships based on mutual trust with all the BIMSTEC nations. These cultural relations can be used to increase the flow of people and tourism in the region, as well as the exchange of cultures, thereby boosting the unity in the region.

Shared Heritage: India and other BIMSTEC countries have many things in common: historical traditions, language, and religion. These bonds of culture are evidence of social relations, hence explaining cooperation and harmony in the region.

Example: International Buddhist Conclave

For example, the International Buddhist Conclave that India has been hosting can be cited as an example of using cultural enmity to foster unity and stability in the region. It is a scholarly conference that involves Buddhist scholars, monks, and practitioners from the BIMSTEC nations, thereby promoting inter-cultural interaction and reviving social relations. All these efforts not only educate people about other cultures but also help boost tourism and, consequently, economic relations.

Accordingly, BIMSTEC holds enormous advantages from an Indian standpoint, which include geopolitical dynamics, economic cooperation, balancing the Chinese influence, and cultural and historical relations. Hence, building upon the above-mentioned strengths, India can boost its soft power in the region, augment prosperity in the region, and encourage other players in the region to cooperate. The vision of BIMSTEC for India is about the core idea of transforming BIMSTEC into a prosperous community in the Bay of Bengal to create stability, security, and development in the region for all the member countries.

2. WEAKNESSES:

Organizational Inefficiency: There are two major criticisms regarding BIMSTEC: it is more of an organizational structure, and the region lacks a standard institutional framework within it. Decision-making mechanisms and project implementation across the organization need to be enhanced due to their slow process, which largely inhibits the organization. This bureaucratic delay hampers the timely implementation of the synergistic actions, negatively affecting India's attempts to advance regional ventures. To illustrate, many of the BIMSTEC deals and architectures remain ink on paper with little to no progress on their actual realization. Consequently, inefficiency reduces the optimum gains that member states, in this case India, could reap from regionalism.

Economic Disparities: The BIMSTEC members have significant differences in their economic development levels, which could be a major challenge to the correct integration of the region. Being the largest economy in the group, India has a huge role and responsibility to cope with these discriminatory issues. This task could likely exert considerable pressure on India and may also create tensions with other LMIC member states that may view the distribution of gains as politically or economically unfair. For instance, India and Thailand can be said to be slightly more developed than other members of the South Asian region and East Asian region, respectively, while Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar could be said to have a lot of developmental issues. Such economic disparities can provoke conflicts and hinder the process of establishing similar policies regarding the integration of the regions.

Limited Connectivity: The physical communication and IT infrastructure of the BIMSTEC area is still lacking in many areas, which hinders regional integration through connectivity. Transportation infrastructures are bleak, and a digital divide hampers trade, investments, and human contact. For example, although India has set up a strong infrastructure, the BIMSTEC countries have not been quite successful, and hence the connectivity projects have become difficult. India's attempt to improve connectivity, like the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, also has logistics and infrastructural issues, which shows the unequal level of infrastructural advancement in the region.

Political Instability: Political upheavals and governance challenges in some countries of the region, for instance, Myanmar and Nepal, affect stability and integration within the context of ASEAN+3. These internal contestations and political instabilities can derogate the processes of consortium programs under BIMSTEC. For instance, political instabilities such as the ones that characterize Myanmar's political landscape today have the potential to derail cooperative initiatives. Likewise, political instability and frequent changes in the government in Nepal are some of the factors that hinder the efficient realization of the aforementioned BIMSTEC projects. These matters call for political stability to facilitate regional activities and set up various initiatives to reap success. That's why, to strengthen these weaknesses, BIMSTEC could provide a more solid and effective organization that would improve the cooperation and development of the region. Nevertheless, the outlined challenges represent a threat to the organization's potential, and coordinated efforts are needed to unlock it.

3. OPPORTUNITIES

Enhancing Trade and Investment There is immense possibility to boost trade and investment relations in BIMSTEC countries among member nations. Thus, there is significant potential for India to positively use this platform for better entrenching into the international system, to gain better access for breaking down tariff barriers, and to escalate to better trade agreements with foreign countries. There is, therefore, potential to mutually develop the economies of the BIMSTEC member countries through regional trade. For instance, the Prime Minister of India can actively encourage the full realization of the BIMSTEC FTA, which has the main goal of increasing intra-regional trade by reducing tariff levels and improving trade liberalization processes. The effectiveness of such agreements boosts the amount of trade and FDI, which consequently results in employment and economic development in the region.

Energy Cooperation: The region sourcing from the Bay of Bengal is therefore naturally blessed with abundant energy resources ranging from natural gas deposits to renewable energy resources. Overall cooperation about

energy exploration, production, and distribution in BIMSTEC member nations can prevent energy problems within the countries. Energy security and sustainability can be developed in the South Asian region with the help of foreign investment from India in JVs (joint ventures) for oil and gas exploration and in renewable sources like solar and wind power. For instance, a concept of the BIMSTEC Energy Center on Decentralized System Development has been proposed to facilitate proper efficiency and management in the energy sector of the region.

Disaster Management and Climate Change: BIMSTEC has a very important role in the formulation of policies and cooperation for disaster management and climate change. The region is very vulnerable to natural disasters like cyclones, floods, and even earthquakes, hence the urgent need for disaster management and periodicity. As a regional power and having the necessary resources and experience, India can spearhead efforts at the BIMSTEC level to prevent disasters and strengthen the members' capacity to cope with them. It has been proven that cooperation can help reduce the consequences of natural disasters and contribute to the formation of effective mechanisms for sustainable development. For instance, India's NDRF can share training and technical support with the representatives of other BIMSTEC countries, increasing the overall capacity for dealing with crises at the regional level.

Strengthening Maritime Security: The Bay of Bengal is also sensitive due to geopolitical factors, as well as being a center for major sea routes; therefore, the issue of maritime security is an acute concern for the BIMSTEC countries. The increased cooperation in the form of naval exercises, sharing of information and intelligence, and joint operations against piracy and other unlawful activities will substantially improve the security level in the region. India has a well-developed naval defense, along with experience in anti-piracy and similar operations; thus, the country may successfully advance similar strategies. For example, the 'Milan' naval exercise between the BIMSTEC member nations successively involves the navies of the BIMSTEC member nations to enhance their mutual coordination and operational integration in countering maritime threats and, hence, improving navy-to-navy cooperation.

In this way, the organization may promote BIMSTEC cooperation with other states, support the economy's development, and guarantee stability and security in the region of the Bay of Bengal.

4. THREATS

Geopolitical Rivalries: The BIMSTEC region is vulnerable to playing the geographic flash point for geopolitical tensions, especially between India and China. China, through its Belt and Road Initiative and other facilities, is gradually penetrating the Bay of Bengal, therefore posing major challenges to India. The BRI involves large amounts of funding for infrastructure in BIMSTEC countries, which creates more economic vulnerability for China. This situation puts India in a rather volatile relationship, which requires a delicate dance to avoid upsetting the delicate balance of the region. For instance, through the BRI investment that China has made in the Kyaukphyu port in Myanmar, it has only improved on its strategic position in the Bay of Bengal, which India sees as a direct competition in the area.

Non-Traditional Security Threats: Thus, the BIMSTEC region is marked by nontraditional security threats like terrorism, human trafficking, and drug trafficking, to name but a few. Such problems can only be solved through collective endeavors and pragmatic and stringent security frameworks. These are real threats that India has to confront and simultaneously work for association and cooperation among the Asian countries for security. For instance, the activation of insurgents in North East India and their links with those in Myanmar and Bangladesh require 'jointness' in the security domain. Cooperation and sharing of information between BIMSTEC member countries are subjects that can effectively address these non-conventional security threats.

Economic Protectionism: The growing protectionism of the economies of various countries and trade barriers pose a threat to regional integration of the BIMSTEC economy. Reservations can be placed on member states or blocked on anything from goods to services to investments, which may not be advantageous to India's economic welfare. To tackle these threats, it is critical to support free trade and the openness of markets. For instance, the rise in tariffs and non-tariff measures by some of the BIMSTEC countries has affected the export competitiveness of Indian goods in the region. Attempts to lower tariffs and obtain better trade conditions are the key activities that can help the process of economic integration sustain its pace.

Environmental Degradation: Lack of bio diversification such as deforestation, pollution, and the overexploitation of fish resources affect the environment of the Bay of Bengal. Co-operative conservation of the environment is required to maintain the species' genetic variations and people's existence in the area. Due to the highlighted challenges, India has to take up the task of environmental sustainability within the BIMSTEC region.

For instance, pollution levels in the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers that drain into the bay have a severe imprint on ecology. Combating these environmental factors requires collective measures in the preservation of river basins, pollution control, and sustainable fishing.

If these threats are averted, then BIMSTEC will be stronger and able to conduct its activities for the benefit of all the member states of this region as per the concept of stability, security, and sustainable development.

INDIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN BIMSTEC

Hence, geopolitical, economic security, and cultural interests are all perfectly intertwined with Indian strategic interests in BIMSTEC. Being the core state in BIMSTEC, India is aimed at increasing its impact on the developments in the Bay of Bengal region as well as boosting economic cooperation, security, and cultural interaction in the area.

Geopolitical Influence: Thus, India occupies a central position in BIMSTEC's map location, which puts India in a position to leverage geopolitics. I suggest that, through working with BIMSTEC, India has the opportunity to expand its sphere of influence in the region and challenge China's practices with projects such as the BRI. For example, due to its active participation in BIMSTEC, India has endeavored to foster its bilateral and multilateral relations with the SEA countries because it is essential for the Act East policy. This engagement assists India to assert itself and protect its interests in the Bay of Bengal and other areas in the region.

Economic Growth: BIMSTEC is a good forum through which India has an opportunity to expand trade and investment relations with neighboring countries. Due to the availability of various resources and markets, this region has a great prospect for economic cooperation. In this context, to bring about an economic transformation, India has actively pursued measures such as the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area (FTA), which facilitates the removal of trade barriers, easy market access, and FDI. For instance, bilateral trade with BIMSTEC countries touched USD 40 billion in the case of India. 44 billion US dollars in 2020–21, which exhibits the heavy interdependency of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia economically and as a corridor for development.

Energy Security: The energy resources in the region consist of natural gas and the potential of renewable sources of energy in the Bay of Bengal region. India's interest in the state is to secure energy in BIMSTEC by investing jointly in the exploration, production, and distribution of energy in the region. The establishment of the to-be-formed BIMSTEC Energy Centre is to help the regional countries properly organize for the enhancement of energy sectors. Hence, this partnership is very important in ensuring that the energy demands of India are met while its dependence on Middle Eastern oil is lessened.

Security Cooperation: Maintaining the security of the region is in the best interest of India, especially in combating terrorism, human trafficking, and drug trafficking. The organization is equally functional in terms of security cooperation in operations and intelligence sharing among BIMSTEC member countries. The National Security Advisor of India has a bilateral mechanism with the counterparts of BIMSTEC countries for handling these security threats. For instance, the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime, and Illicit Drug Trafficking also proves India's seriousness in strengthening regional security through BIMSTEC cooperation.

Cultural and Historical Ties: This is the foundation that defines Indian soft power in the context of BIMSTEC. Due to the similarity in cultural and historical backgrounds, India has close relations with all these countries. Building on these relationships, India stresses the diplomacy of human relations, travel, and the exchange of cultures to forge unity in the region. The 'International Buddhist Conclave' organized by India is the step taken that reflects in the enhancement of cultural linkages in BIMSTEC. This event is a congregation of Buddhist scholars and practitioners from member countries, which enhances cultural exchange.

Maritime Security: There is an absolute need to have stringent maritime security because of the strategic location of the Bay of Bengal. India aims at improving maritime security through BIMSTEC through exercises, the exchange of maritime information, and countering piracy and unlawful activities. For instance, the Milan series is a bilateral naval exercise between the BIMSTEC navy and other BIMSTEC concurrent nations, thus enhancing the cooperation and effectiveness of the regional marine forces that contribute to the combating of maritime crimes and terrorism. This is crucial to the enhancement of the security of sea lines of communication and the guarantee of secure passage for shipment.

KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Enhanced Geopolitical Influence: The involvement of India in BIMSTEC has major geopolitical impacts, expanding India's strategic position in the Bay of Bengal and the greater Indo-Pacific. International politics requires

a country to play a role as the core of the organization; thus, India can effectively balance China through the BRI. For instance, India's engagement with BIMSTEC has fostered its stand in bilateral and multilateral relations with the Southeast Asian nations in tune with its Act East Policy. Due to this strategic positioning, India is in a position of power, especially in projecting its military might, securing its sea lanes, and improving its diplomacy.

2. Economic Integration and Growth: BIMSTEC as an organization plays an important role in economic cooperation and mainly focuses on the trade and investment of its member countries. Analysis of the Indian perspective shows that it is not averse to the establishment of FTAs, and it wants the BIMSTEC FTA realized as soon as possible. For instance, India's exports and imports with the BIMSTEC member countries were approximately USD 40. As a result, ASEAN's combined GDP in the financial year 2020–21 stood at \$2.46 billion, which shows the integration and vulnerability of the ASEAN region economically as well as the scope for its development. The efficient realization of the FTA brings improvements in trade volumes, distinctive markets, and investment mileage that culminate in regional development.

3. Energy Security Collaboration: The production of energy is rife in the Bay of Bengal region, and this makes it possible to engage in various energy cooperation projects. The strategic interest of India in BIMSTEC comprises energy security for mutual exploration, production, and marketing of natural gas and renewable energy. The recently proposed BIMSTEC Energy Centre seeks to enhance cooperation on energy issues, serving the members' energy demands as well as sustainability. The partnership is vital for India in terms of providing more energy to meet the increasing demand while at the same time decreasing its reliance on Middle Eastern oil.

4. Regional Security and Counter-Terrorism: The role of BIMSTEC in combating terrorism, human trafficking, and drug and arms trafficking can be effective because it is based on regional cooperation. Integration work, such as cooperation in joint operations and the sharing of intelligence, improves cooperation in a region. India's active participation in the maintenance of regional security can be credited to the country's effort to instate various conventions, such as the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime, and Illicit Drug Trafficking. All these collaborations are crucial for the provision of mutual safety and security in the region.

5. Strengthening Cultural and Historical Ties: Promoting cultural and historical relations with BIMSTEC members makes India gain soft power and brings the region closer. For these relationships, India encourages tourism and the provision of opportunities for people-to-people interaction and exchange. For instance, the International Buddhist Conclave that was convened by India aimed at reviewing and advancing the facet of civilization between the Indian and the member countries. Often, such initiatives contribute to the strengthening of cultural relations and also help boost tourism and, therefore, economic cooperation.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthening Institutional Framework: It is further observed that to make BIMSTEC more effective, the institution building of BIMSTEC is required to be further advanced. Having adequate staff with authorized decision-making power, enough supply and equipment, and proper means of operation can simplify processes and lead to prompt implementation of the agenda. Having specific committees for the institutional segments, which include group-specific sectors like trade, energy, and security, can aid in goal-oriented and, more importantly, professional processes. Also, the frequency of having summits and ministerial meetings should be made a normative process to ensure follow-up and deal with novel issues.

2. Promoting Inclusive Economic Growth: Thus, to promote the concept of a successful and balanced common economic BIMSTEC space, it is imperative to seek to overcome today's problems between the states as representatives of BIMSTEC and socialize an economically antisocial division. India can emerge as the leader in creating awareness and supporting financially and technically the less developed member countries. To overcome this, people from both nations should join efforts, especially in the areas of the development of infrastructure and other capacities as well as the transfer of technologies. For instance, promoting partnerships on new initiatives in areas such as agriculture and manufacturing, the digital economy, etc. will help the region boost development and employment.

3. Enhancing Connectivity: Better transport and communication infrastructure is required for better interaction and trade relations. Promoting the construction of infrastructure, including highways, rail, and ports, is some of the growth that improves the transportation systems in the region. The process of undertaking projects like the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thai Trilateral Highway should be further

accelerated. Further, the efforts to narrow down the digital gap through better and upgraded broadband infrastructure and advanced digitization will also help in trade, investment, and even people's mobility.

4. Collaborative Energy Projects: Instead, more significance should be laid on a collective endeavor to develop the energy resources in the Bay of Bengal area. The author lowered its targets for India, suggesting that India should take the lead in the joint exploration and development of natural gas fields as well as the expansion and construction of renewable power generation plants, especially solar and wind ones. It is argued that creating the BIMSTEC Energy Grid is beneficial for developing the mechanism of trading in energy and distributing electricity efficiently among the member countries. Cooperation in this area can thus help in improving energy security, bear lower costs, and maintain positive developments in the area.

5. Strengthening Security Cooperation: For an efficient response to non-traditional security threats, BIMSTEC may need to work on the architecture of its security diplomacy. Security leaders should insist on the impending formation of a regional security task force to enhance cooperation in dealing with terrorism, human trafficking, and drug dealing. Mileage can therefore be derived from the involvement of joint training, programs, and military exercises in enhancing the capacities of member states' security forces. Moreover, the stability of the littoral states' security through enhanced naval cooperation against piracy and illegal fishing activities is also recommended.

6. Environmental Sustainability and Disaster Management: Thus, cooperation in the field is crucial for environmental protection and the management of disasters for sustainable development in the region. The organization needs to formulate inclusive environment policies since they are missing in BIMSTEC, including such topics as pollution, deforestation, and fishing. From this article, pumping the disaster response fund on the regional level as well as upgrading the early warnings is some of the ways that can effectively contribute towards disaster prevention. Other opportunities include cooperation on climate change vulnerabilities and adaptation and mitigation measures for member states.

7. Cultural and Educational Exchanges: One suggested way of enhancing cooperation in BIMSTEC member countries is to increase cultural and educational exchanges between the nations' populations. More scholarship programs and student exchange processes in India must be promoted for students from the BIMSTEC countries. Cultural fairs, art galleries, and historical tourism activities regarding culture can be used to mark some of the important cultural and historical background of the region. The kind of initiatives that are fostered not only benefit cultural diplomacy but also foster unity and cooperation within the region.

CONCLUSION:

The perspective of BIMSTEC is that it can contribute to the further advancement of regional cooperation, the economy, and the social development of the countries in the region of the Bay of Bengal. India actively participates in the BIMSTEC because of its political and geographical affinities, economic initiatives, and, last but not least, regional stability and security. On the positive side, BIMSTEC has plenty of upsides in terms of trade and investment, energy, and cultural relations; on the negative side, geopolitical rivalry, the organization's inefficiency, and insufficient economic development in some member countries persist. The following broad challenges need to be effectively negated through sound institutional structures: economic integration, connectivity, energy cooperation, and environmental cooperation, for BIMSTEC to attain its collective potential. Exploiting its favorable location and encouraging the synthesis of cooperation, India can completely transform BIMSTEC as a youthful and active regional organization, thus fostering the development of optimism and a long-term view into the future that holds prosperity and stability for all.

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