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Comparative Study on the Rise of BIMSTEC With Reference to SAARC Functioning

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ABSTRACT

In the recent past the failure of SAARC to foster cooperation in South Asia has opened up the horizon for search for some other alternative. Perhaps, BIMSTEC comes to the rescue for the regional players as most of the member states popularly favour BIMSTEC as a viable option. BIMSTEC is in the spotlight in the wake of being disregarded for 10 years, BIMSTEC is currently expected to perform at the level of an Association of Southeast Asian Nations or the European Union when it has a small amount of the assets of SAARC. BIMSTEC is ordered to extend local participation through nothing under 14 working gatherings, covering everything under the Bay of Bengal sun, including an organized commerce understanding, destitution easing, tourism, vitality and environmental change, and even counterterrorism and calamity administration. Whether BIMSTEC can fill the space created by SAARC and whether BIMSTEC can carry the burden of being a natural platform for South-Asia regionalism.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the advent of International organization in the universal sphere, all the states actively participated in the international cooperation and also pursued all round economic and social development. But due to certain hurdles like geographical entity, border problem and the world powerful economies organized on a collective basis appeared serious challenge to the humanity. To overcome such issues regional cooperation was setup for the common development.

As the SAARC is not running smoothly as compared to earlier period due to the disputes between India and Pakistan the BIMSTEC was developed to overcome the situation suffered by the other South Asian Developing countries. This regional cooperation was established on 6th June 1997 to promote socio-economic collaboration amongst other South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Thailand and it was called as BIMSTEC. However after inclusion of Myanmar in 1998 it was renamed as BIMSTEC. Nepal and Bhutan joined this organization in the year 2004. Basically it was established by the Member countries to establish

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a path between South and South-East Asian countries. The main objective of BIMSTEC is to establish technological and economic cooperation among other member countries. It is a sub-regional organization comprises of seven countries in the South Asian and South East Asian countries. In this project the primary aim of researcher is to throw light on the rise of BIMSTEC with reference to SAARC functioning.

II. BIMSTEC

BIMSTEC is a regional composition of 7 countries in South Asia and South East Asia lying in littoral and adjacent areas of Bay of Bengal constituting contiguous regional unity². On June 6, 1997, a new sub regional grouping was formed in Bangkok³, also known as Bangkok Declaration, under the name BISTEC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation)⁴. The grouping was expanded by including Myanmar on 22nd December 1997 and Nepal and Bhutan in February 2004, thus remaining it as BIMSTEC or Bay of Bengal initiative for Economic and Multi Sectoral Cooperation.

BIMSTEC brings together 1.5 billion people, which comprise 22% of world population and a combined GDP of over \$ 2.7 trillion. The Bay of Bengal is one of the least integrated regions with abysmal level of trade. BIMSTEC endeavours to bridge the gap between countries around the bay. The Bay of Bengal, world's largest bay, is of pivotal importance to the countries bordering it. The highly populated bay carries lot of economic potential. While the exact definitions may vary, the bay's scope is generally defined as a 'triangular basis' stretching west to east between Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Linking the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean, the Bay of Bengal occupies a central position in relation to global economic flows in a way that few other regions do. Therefore, BIMSTEC is well positioned to make sizeable contributions towards advancing regional connectivity through a series of organisational and substantive reforms would help to increase its effectiveness. BIMSTEC is to encourage rapid economic development and encourage trade, tourism, agriculture, energy and infrastructure.

BIMSTEC's prime objective is to promote technologies and economic cooperation between South Asia and South East Asian Countries. BIMSTEC is sector driven cooperative organisation starting with six sectors including trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism and fisheries. In 2008, it was expanded to include 8 more sectors including agriculture, public

² "About BIMSTEC". 2020. *Bimstec.Org*. Accessed January 4. https://bimstec.org/?page_id=189

³ Xavier, Constantino. 2020. "Bridging The Bay Of Bengal: Toward A Stronger BIMSTEC". *Carnegie India*. Accessed January 6. <https://carnegieindia.org/2018/02/22/bridging-bay-of-bengal-toward-stronger-bimstec-pub-75610>.

⁴*Ibid*.

health, poverty alleviation, counter-terrorism, environment, culture, people to people contact and climate change⁵. Recently in 4th Summit of BIMSTEC two more sectors were included that are Blue Economy and Mountain Economy. It needs to be underlined that BIMSTEC has in a relatively short period come of age. Though, not much focus has been given to it, this sub regional organizations has its own strength as it brings closer 22% of world's population.

BIMSTEC has certainly made good improvements in connecting the region and has made similar key achievements. It has identified priorities or infrastructure and connectivity in regions. A memorandum of understanding on grid interconnections for smooth power sharing infrastructure in South Asian region was finalised by members in furtherance of 'Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation in BIMSTEC'. BIMSTEC was also successful in establishing and Operationalising of BIMSTEC Energy centre in Bengaluru⁶.

Free Trade Agreement in order to stimulate trade and investment and to attract outsiders for trading and investing purposes at a higher level is one of the main projects aspired by BIMSTEC.⁷ However, the progress is slow but consciously made. BIMSTEC is collectively against terrorism and was successful in signing a convention on suppression of Terrorism (2009). Besides this, Convention on Trafficking in Persons, TSP and Extradition are also in progress.

Although BIMSTEC is progressing towards economic cooperation but it is facing challenges as well in the present era. One of the biggest challenges is that of terrorism. Recent attacks in Dhaka and Uri are clear reminder of how terrorism has emerged as a more serious threat to peace and security. For connectivity, infrastructure is very important element. India bilaterally as well as regionally is posed with a challenge to connect regions, including north eastern regions to Myanmar and Thailand. When we talk of blue economy, about our massive resources, about fisheries as a sector and tourism including the cruise tourism, it is important to harness this challenge and to have a holistic approach and also for inland waterways.

Water, of course has proved to be a challenge for the region. Floods and cyclones are reasons where Bay of Bengal initiative can be very important element to focus our energies on. Given our close proximity, not just geographical but cultural as well, tourism in terms of our historic civilisation linkage, particularly through Buddhism, provide yet another element where

⁵"South Asia: Regional Cooperation Strategy And Program (2006-2008)". 2008. Asian Development Bank. <https://www.adb.org/documents/south-asia-regional-cooperation-strategy-and-program-2006-2008>.

⁶"BIMSTEC, The Road Ahead | Research And Information System For Developing Countries". 2016. Ris.Org.In. <https://www.ris.org.in/bimstec-road-ahead>.

⁷"South Asia: Regional Cooperation Strategy And Program (2006-2008)". 2008. Asian Development Bank. <https://www.adb.org/documents/south-asia-regional-cooperation-strategy-and-program-2006-2008>.

BIMSTEC can focus.

Also, being rich solar energy recipient zone, it is important for BIMSTEC to harness and commit to sustainable development.

III. SAARC

SAARC, organization of South Asian Nations, founded in 1985 and dedicated to economic, technological, social and cultural development emphasising collective self- reliance.

Presently there are eight members in SAARC, namely Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Initially, the idea of regional cooperation in South Asia was first mooted in May, 1980. The foreign secretaries of Seven Countries met for first times in Colombo in April 1981. The five broad areas for regional cooperation were identified by the committee of the whole, which met in Colombo in August 1981.⁸ SAARC came into being nation when its charter was formally approved on 8th December, 1985 by Heads of State of all members except Afghanistan which became member in 14th SAARC Summit in 2007.

The objective of the SAARC is to promote the welfare of the people of South Asia and to improve their quality of life; to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development. It also aims at to provide all individuals the opportunity to live with dignity and to realise their full potentials.

Co-operation in SAARC is based on respect for five principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non interference in internal affairs of member states and mutual benefit.

The areas of cooperation are very wide ranging that is, agricultural and rural, Prior technology, culture, Economic and Trade, Education, Energy, Environment, Finance, Information Technology and Communications, People to People Contact, Poverty alleviation, Science and Technology, Security aspects, Tourism, etc.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF SAARC

The scope and substance of SAARC had expanded to diverse fields. The SAARC summits have indeed created a platform for closed door bilateral talks exclusive to participating nations. The scope of regional cooperation in SAARC has proliferated and it had started to engage

⁸ Paulo, Sebastian. 2019. "India-EU Cooperation In The SDG Era: Unlocking The Potential Of A Development Partnership In Transition". *Orfonline.Org*. https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ORF_Monograph_India-EUDevelopmentPartnership.pdf.

political, social, economic, cultural aspects in its dialogue.

In a landmark move, SAARC nations unanimously decided to form South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA). The agreement on SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) was signed in 1993 and 4 rounds of trade negotiations have been concluded. With objective of moving towards South Asian Economic Union (SAEU), the agreement on South Asia Free Trade Area was signed. SAFTA comes into force by the year 2006.

For the development of outer space technology South Asian Satellite was launched under the auspicious of SAARC on 5th May, 2017. This satellite will enhance services in the area of telecommunications and broadcasting which will benefit Tele-education, Tele-medicine and disaster management support, etc. This is also supposed to help the countries in the region for mapping different terrains and natural resources.

FAILURES OF SAARC

Right from its inception, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has failed in its objective of developing cooperation among its members. It has always fell prey to face-off between India and Pakistan. The deteriorating relationship between the two countries affects the working of an organisation. Had the members worked in Union, a new era in prosperity and peace would have ushered in by this time in the region.

SAARC has had about 30 odd summits, out of which 11 summits have never seen the light of the day only because of tensions between the member states. Even after 3 decades of existence, SAARC'S performance has been less satisfactory and its role in strengthening regional cooperation is being questioned.

Recently, SAARC faced another set back after the 19th Summit Scheduled to be held in Pakistan in 2016 was suspended for indefinite period.

In many of failures of SAARC, lack of trust among member countries has been the most significant factor between India and Pakistan. It had also fasted in benefitting the bloc economically. Even though the region accounts for 21% of the world population, its share in global GDP is just around 3%. Being one of the poverty ridden areas of the world, there is limited avenues to achieve synergy.

Almost every member is facing numerous internal crises like Tamils issue in Sri Lanka, Constitutional crisis in Nepal, religious fundamentalism in Pakistan and Bangladesh, Terrorism and instability in Afghanistan has made these nations inward-looking with not much enthusiasm to achieve collaboration in the sub continent.

The long pending issues between Members like fishermen issue between India and Sri Lanka, Teesta water sharing between India and Bangladesh, lack of district access to Afghanistan to other members except Pakistan have restricted in arriving at common ground for regional integration and also resulted in increased mistrust among the members. Also, increasing presence of China in the region and reservation of India with China is creating a major roadblock.

In respect of South Asia Satellite which was supported by all other members except for Pakistan this shows the lack of value creation and lack of trust among SAARC Members Nations. Pakistan has its own reservation about the operations of this particular satellite. As per some reports Pakistan has maintain that it had security concerns especially in respect of espionage. Initially Afghanistan also had same concerns about this project.

IV. BIMSTEC- AS AN ALTERNATIVE

New Delhi's diplomatic measures since October 2016 seem to indicate a concerned move to throw away the albatross of Pakistan around South Asia's neck and revive BIMSTEC, a regional grouping that has been in existence since 1997 but had not realised its full potential so far. Until 2016, BIMSTEC failed to be effective or even cohesive. In 2016 however, India took initiative to revive the regional ties.

BIMSTEC, made of countries around Bay of Bengal, have no major bilateral group between member countries. So, it is easier to establish corporation in various fields. So India took initiative and organised a BNCS- BIMSTEC Outreach Summit and BIMSTEC Leader Retreat. In fact BIMSTEC as an alternative provides a range of options for multi-sectoral regional ties and it seems to have a great deal of potential.

BIMSTEC will also be complimentary for various initiatives of India, new found concept of Indo-Pacific, Act East Policy etc.. Also reduced conflicts between the members will aid in achieving a common ground for regional prosperity and stability.

BIMSTEC holds great opportunity for trade and investments. But geopolitics was the reason for the birth of the BIMSTEC. This is because the Indian Ocean has become the strategic pivot where rivalry between India and China are paramount. As much as 60% of China's oil sources traverse through the Indian Ocean, and have the Malacca Strait, which is under the control of US Navy.

It is also believed that the Indian Ocean is the "Chicken's Neck", so as to speak of China's National Security, India's control over the Indian Ocean could critically threaten China's

energy Security, with or without the U.S.A. India's Look East Policy is, therefore primarily a counter to China's String of Pearls' Strategy⁹.

COMPARISON BETWEEN BIMSTEC AND SAARC

SAARC failed to nurture cooperation in South Asia which has pushed regional players to search for an alternative, BIMSTEC which is popularly favoured as the viable option.¹⁰

• FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) was signed in 1993. Since, the scope of SAPTA was limited; therefore SAPTA was expanded to SAFTA adopted in 2004 by 12th SAARC Summit.

Member Countries recognised the need to progress beyond a preferential agreement and move towards higher level of trade and economic cooperation in the region. Trade Liberalisation Programme was also introduced under SAFTA. Phase I was implemented from 2006 to 2014 and Phase II from 2014 onwards. When SAFTA was initially signed, the goals including forming a common currency for the region and forming a Custom Union (CU) which would eventually lead to Total Economic Integration. The first stage was successful to certain countries, to Sri Lanka only to some extent. However, SAARC could not keep upto the promise and vision it led, mainly due to rift between India and Pakistan¹¹.

BIMSTEC has gained more importance recently because of many hurdles that have come in way of SAFTA since 2016. There are possibilities of stronger trade and investment ties between BIMSTEC nations by expediting the signing of a Free Trade Agreement.

For India this sub-regional grouping is important because it covers north eastern region that remains largely underdeveloped. This region under BIMSTEC can opt for higher integration with East, facilitating trade and development as well as attracting foreign investment.

Also, importantly, the connectivity of Northeast with Myanmar and Thailand will also be important for a trade route to countries of ASEAN.

BIMSTEC is one of the least integrated regions although member countries are contiguous to

⁹ Rana, Madhukar SJB, and Atul K Thakur. 2020. "BIMSTEC: Sea Of Trade And Connectivity Opportunities Waiting To Be Explored". *Dailyo.In*. <https://www.dailyo.in/politics/bimstec-narendra-modi-nepal-kp-oli-bay-of-bengal-china/story/1/26382.html>.

¹⁰ BHATTACHARJEE, JOYEETA. 2018. "SAARC Vs BIMSTEC: The Search For The Ideal Platform For Regional Cooperation". *Orfonline.Org*. https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ORF_Issue_Brief_226_BIMSTEC-SAARC.pdf.

¹¹ Bhatta, Chandra D.2004. "Regional Integration In South Asia: Cooperation Versus Conflict." ResearchGate.. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314796580_Regional_Integration_In_South_Asia_Cooperation_Versus_Conflict.

one another, except for Sri Lanka. For India, BIMSTEC is closely knit for investment but trade has not reached its optimum level. India and Sri Lanka signed Free Trade Agreement in 2005. India and Thailand also have a Free Trade Agreement. There is open border between India and Nepal. No visa is required between India and Bhutan. India's Act East Policy is also instrumental in gaining momentum for considering BIMSTEC as an alternative. BIMSTEC has become very important for India as there have been many hurdles in way of SAFTA and escalation of cross border terrorism. BIMSTEC trade negotiation took place under the auspices of Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC). It mainly covered tariff concessions on trade in goods, customs cooperation, and trade in services, investment cooperation and dispute settlement.

To have successful BIMSTEC era, it is important to have proper integration of the bloc. In case of ASEAN, efficient cross border transportation is most important. Thus proper highways, free movement should be enhanced to reap maximum benefits. Focus should also be on Rail and Sea Transport to enable seamless Continuity of trade flows.

- SUMMITS/ MEETINGS

Summits and meetings on both SAARC and BIMSTEC have had many planned summits but in reality they never materialised on ground. BIMSTEC has now been in existence for two decades while SAARC is there in existence for three decades. In case of SAARC out of 30, approximately 11 summits have never seen the light of the day because of regional disturbances, mainly contributing to its failure as a regional bloc.

However, BIMSTEC mechanism provides better ground for encouraging participation for regional competency. BIMSTEC declaration provides for 'Annual Ministerial Meeting', to be hosted by the Member States on the basis of alphabetical rotation. Therefore it provides opportunities for member states to discuss more issues in comprehensive manner. Also the Bangkok declaration provides for various meetings and summits explicitly in the document, like BIMSTEC Summit, Ministerial Meeting, Senior Officials Meeting and BIMSTEC Working Group Meeting etc. These deliberations provide a ground for better engagement. On the other hand SAARC mechanism is not so comprehensive in this manner. Various ministerial meetings have resulted in substantive outcomes. For example, the recent 4th Summit¹² held in August 2018 laid ground for 'Poverty Alleviation Plan' to end poverty in the region by 2030 and also a commitment from leaders to reinvigorate the BIMSTEC process. Whereas last two SAARC summits have to be cancelled because of tensions between the states, first Uri attacks

¹²THE ECONOMIC TIMES. 2018. "4Th BIMSTEC Summit Concludes", 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/4th-bimstec-summit-concludes/articleshow/65621998.cms>.

and then because of boycott from members.

The first BIMSTEC Summit took place in Bangkok in Thailand in 2004. The second and third summits were held in New Delhi in 2008 and Nay Pi Taw in Myanmar in 2014. The fourth summit is held at Kathmandu in 2018. However, the mechanism under BIMSTEC provides co-operation among many sectors whereas SAARC document only talks about the meeting of the Head of to State once a year.

SAARC Summits were repeatedly postponed owing to many reasons but mostly because of the prevailing political disputes and hostile relations between South Asian Countries. The taxing relations between India and Sri Lanka (1988–91), India–Bangladesh problem (1992 and 2005) and India– Pakistan rivalry (1994–1996, 1999–2003 and 2016) have badly impinged on the process of South Asian regionalism. Unresolved bilateral issues, political disputes and domestic problems of members also affected the Summits. Member states have also not taken serious interest and have lacked the will to host Summits regularly. In the first decade (1986–1995), seven Summits were held, while five moots were held each in the second (1996–2005) and third (2006–2015) decades¹³. This shows members' decreasing interest in the Summit process which is substantiated by the fact that they amended the SAARC Charter that now provides that the Summit should be convened once every two years. Often SACs prioritised internal considerations such as national budget preparations, tourist seasons, election activities etc., over holding of Summits which also shows lack of sincerity and commitment to the process of South Asian regionalism. Their domestic problems, such as political crises, unrest, instability, violence and insurgencies also affected the process.

- DEFENCE/ MILITARY COOPERATION

Defence and military cooperation provides a profound stage for engagement at multi-regional level. The 'SAARC Disaster Management Centre' was set up in 2006, it was an important move in facilitating capacity building services as well as providing policy guidance for SAARC nations in mitigating the impact of natural disasters¹⁴. However, nothing substantial has ever come out from this. By all means the possibility of safeguard and military collaboration between SAARC nations would have all the put by of being past the domain of plausibility given their conflictual relations. For sure, aside from the outstanding India-Pakistan threats,

¹³ Kumar, Rajeesh. 2016. "South Asian 'Zombie': The Futility of Reviving SAARC." Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. <https://idsa.in/issuebrief/south-asian-zombie-the-futility-of-reviving-saarc-rkumar-010518>.

¹⁴ Standard, Business. 2019. "Displaying categorized search results for "20th saarc summit"." Business News, Finance News, India News, BSE/NSE News, Stock Markets News, Sensex NIFTY, Latest Breaking News Headlines. <https://www.business-standard.com/search?q=20th+saarc+summit>.

there have been comparable encounters between Afghanistan-Pakistan, India-Bangladesh, and even Nepal-Bhutan.

While the recent 4th BIMSTEC summit where 'Kathmandu Declaration' was adopted, members unanimously pledged to jointly combat terrorism in its all form. BIMSTEC leaders strongly condemned terrorism in all its form and manifestation. The declaration says that the nations deplore terrorist attacks in all parts of the world including in BIMSTEC countries¹⁵. It also states that there can be no justification whatsoever for any act of terrorism. BIMSTEC nations affirmed their support to identify and hold accountable states and non-state entities that encourage, support or finance terrorism. It also calls upon all countries to devise a comprehensive approach to stop terror financing. A special task force was proposed for counter-terrorism activities. On the same lines first field training military exercise was conducted in Pune¹⁶ under BIMSTEC regime. The premise of the exercise is 'counter-terrorism in semi-urban terrain'. Its main objective is to promote strategic alliance among member-states and to share 'best practices' in the area of counter-terrorism.

V. WAY FORWARD

BIMSTEC has in recent times grown to be a better alternative for regional grouping. While SAARC stumbles and struggles to be truthful India is undoubtedly an anchor for BIMSTEC but it remains to be seen, if India will accord it the attention and privilege it requires amongst different multilateral grouping that India is part of.

In terms of geographical contiguity and spread natural resources BIMSTEC is a unique initiative of regional cooperation and it has the vast combined labour force of its member states.¹⁷ BIMSTEC together boast access to the Indian Ocean and the Himalayas as well as natural resources such as Sapphire, Ruby, Oil, Gas and Hydro power. Also, with young and vast labour force- 6 out of 10 are aged 18-55 years, the future lies in BIMSTEC and Bay of Bengal. In BIMSTEC trade is the major priority accounting for about 60% of grouping's combined GDP and at the same time tariff is no longer a major barrier for intra-regional trade.

In the recent past, BIMSTEC has come out of a low profile regional bloc and has tried to strengthen its existence. First a permanent secretariat has been established in Dhaka. Secondly

¹⁵ *Fourth BIMSTEC Summit Declaration, Kathmandu, Nepal (August 30-31, 2018)*. New Delhi: Press Information Bureau, 2018. Accessed September 27, 2019. <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=183185>.

¹⁶ NDTV. "In A First, Joint BIMSTEC Military Exercises Begin Near Pune." September 10, 2018. Accessed September 27, 2019. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/in-a-first-joint-bimstec-military-exercises-begin-near-pune-1914443>.

¹⁷ De, Prabir. "Big Ideas to Shape BIMSTEC's Future." East Asia Forum. Accessed September 28, 2019. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/09/15/big-ideas-to-shape-bimstecs-future/>.

Land Boundary Agreement has been entered between India and Bangladesh and a peaceful settlement agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar on Maritime issue¹⁸. Third as tension between India and Pakistan persists, development in SAARC will remain slow-moving. Though, we see BIMSTEC as an alternative to SAARC, but currently few members especially Nepal doesn't see it as an alternative and want both SAARC and BIMSTEC to work in tandem. It is believed that SAARC and BIMSTEC compliments each other and cannot substitute each other. Besides its cross-regional structure, BIMSTEC has huge economic potential given the region's economic dynamism, huge markets and rich natural resources. Therefore it can be said that BIMSTEC is a natural choice to strengthen India's footprints in neighbourhood under its Act East Policy¹⁹. Through improved cross-regional relationships, particularly in commerce, culture and connectivity, BIMSTEC may truly come of age in years to come.

VI. CONCLUSION

A key problem with the stagnation of SAARC has put new grounds for BIMSTEC in recent times. The failures of SAARC on many fronts have been the prime reason for India to look for other alternatives.²⁰ Perhaps, BIMSTEC is the only viable mechanism available for South-Asia region. However, political tensions between neighbour states and a sense of uncertainty need to be avoided for future dialogues in this regional group. Particularly, India needs to do away with its 'Big Brother Attitude' in the region and should be sensitive towards the concerns of small states. These small states are more than willing for engagement under BIMSTEC mechanism. India should capitalise on this golden opportunity. There is a predisposition in some sections to look India's interests in BIMSTEC as a measure to isolate Pakistan and present BIMSTEC as an alternative to SAARC. The above examples suggest otherwise. Importantly one more thing is at stake for India, India's desire to link South Asia to the economically dynamic Southeast Asia, and India should proceed further strategically to fulfil its objectives.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Harsh V. Pant, K. Yhome, 'Challenges At BIMSTEC' (*The Hindu*, 2018) accessed 24 September 2018. <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/challenges-at-bimstec/article24814548.ece>.