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A new push in the Bay of Bengal

(The Hindu, 27-07-24)

India hosted the 2nd BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) Foreign Ministers' Retreat in New Delhi in early July.

BIMSTEC stands for **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation**.

It's a regional organization comprising 7 member countries:

1. Bangladesh
2. Bhutan
3. India
4. Myanmar (Burma)
5. Nepal
6. Sri Lanka
7. Thailand

Headquartered in Dhaka, Bangladesh, BIMSTEC was established in 1997 to foster cooperation and collaboration among its member states, promoting regional growth and prosperity.

How does BIMSTEC align with India's foreign policy objectives?

- Allows India to engage multilaterally with eastern neighbors
- Supports India's 'Neighborhood First' policy and 'Act East' policy
- Aligns with India's SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region) vision
- Helps counter China's growing presence in the Bay of Bengal region
- Provides access to the sea for India's landlocked northeastern region

What was the purpose and focus of the 2nd BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Retreat?

- Provided an informal platform to discuss cooperation in security, connectivity, trade, and investment
- Prepared for the sixth BIMSTEC summit meeting scheduled for September 2024
- Aimed to strengthen ties among Bay of Bengal countries
- Discussed signing the BIMSTEC Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation

What were the key proposals and discussions during the retreat?

- Establishment of Centers of Excellence in agriculture, disaster management, and maritime transport
- Support for cancer research and treatment, including e-visas for patients
- Focus on private sector involvement in trade and promoting young entrepreneurs
- Emphasis on connectivity, cyber-security, and countering trafficking
- Cooperation in Blue Economy, tourism, cultural exchanges, and non-traditional security domains
- Bilateral discussions also happened on the sidelines
 - India raised concerns with Myanmar about displaced persons, narcotics, and arms across the border
 - Discussions with Bangladesh on smooth supply of daily essentials and the Teesta project

Can you answer the following question?

Evaluate the strategic importance of BIMSTEC for India's regional diplomacy and economic goals.

Climate Change Adaptation Vs Mitigation

(The Hindu, 27-07-24)

The Economic Survey has pointed to flaws and inequities in the global climate action regime and suggested alternative pathways that incorporate lifestyle and behavioural changes. It also argued that adaptation should get at least as much importance as mitigation.

What's the Difference Between Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation?

Climate Change Mitigation

- It refers to efforts to reduce or prevent the emission of greenhouse gases.
- The primary aim is to slow down, stop, or reverse global warming and its associated impacts.
- Examples:
 - Transitioning to renewable energy sources
 - Improving energy efficiency
 - Reducing deforestation
 - Implementing carbon pricing
 - Developing and adopting clean technologies
- Timeframe: Mitigation efforts are often focused on long-term prevention and reduction of climate change.

Climate Change Adaptation:

- Adaptation involves adjusting to the actual or expected effects of climate change.
- The main objective is to reduce the vulnerability of social and biological systems to the impacts of climate change.
- Examples:
 - Building sea walls to protect against rising sea levels
 - Developing drought-resistant crops
 - Improving water management systems
 - Creating early warning systems for extreme weather events
 - Redesigning urban infrastructure to cope with changing climate conditions
- Timeframe: Adaptation strategies often address more immediate or near-future impacts of climate change.

Key Differences:

- Focus: Mitigation targets the causes of climate change, while adaptation deals with its effects.
- Scope: Mitigation is generally global in nature, while adaptation is often more localized or regional.
- Urgency: Both are crucial, but adaptation may be more urgent in areas already experiencing severe climate impacts.

What is the Developed Countries (US & EU bloc) perspective regarding climate change action?

- Mitigation Focus:

- Propose: Stronger emphasis on global mitigation efforts, arguing that reducing emissions is crucial to prevent catastrophic climate change.
- Counter-argument: Developing countries argue this unfairly limits their economic growth potential. The present international climate architecture is more about preserving the existing world order and less about saving the planet. They argue that the more equitable and effective Kyoto Protocol was eventually replaced by the Paris Agreement.
- Equal Responsibility:
 - Propose: All countries should contribute to emissions reduction based on current emissions levels.
 - Counter-argument: Developing countries argue this ignores historical emissions and differing capacities to act.
- Technology Transfer:
 - Propose: Offering technological assistance to help developing countries leapfrog to cleaner technologies.
 - Counter-argument: Developing countries often see this as insufficient or tied to unfair conditions or as empty promises.

What is the Developing Countries (India & Southern bloc) perspective regarding climate change action?

- Adaptation Priority:
 - Propose: Greater focus and funding for adaptation, as they are often more vulnerable to climate impacts.
 - Counter-argument: Developed countries argue this doesn't address the root cause and may lead to runaway climate change.
- Historical Responsibility:
 - Propose: Developed countries should bear more responsibility due to their historical emissions.
 - Counter-argument: Developed countries argue current and future emissions matter most for addressing the crisis.
- Right to Development:
 - Propose: They should have the right to develop their economies using cheaper, conventional energy sources.
 - Counter-argument: Developed countries argue this approach is unsustainable globally.
- Climate Finance:
 - Propose: Substantial financial support from developed countries for both mitigation and adaptation. They push for compensation for climate-related losses (Loss & Damage Fund)
 - Counter-argument: Developed countries often cite budget constraints and demand accountability in fund usage. With regard to L&D Fund, they are reluctant to accept liability, prefer focus on risk reduction.

What is the way forward?

Integrated Approach to Mitigation and Adaptation:

- Recognize the interconnectedness of these strategies and promote policies that address both simultaneously.
- For example, reforestation projects that both sequester carbon and protect against soil erosion.

Differentiated Commitments:

- Implement a tiered system of commitments based on a country's level of development, current emissions, and capacity to act.
- This could allow for more ambitious targets from developed nations while providing flexibility for developing countries.

Enhanced Climate Finance:

- Increase and streamline international climate finance, ensuring it's adequate, predictable, and accessible.
- Explore innovative financing mechanisms like green bonds or carbon pricing to generate additional funds.

Technology Transfer and Cooperation:

- Establish mechanisms for sharing green technologies while addressing intellectual property concerns.
- Create joint research and development initiatives between developed and developing countries.

Capacity Building:

- Invest in programs to enhance developing countries' ability to implement both mitigation and adaptation measures.
- This includes technical assistance, training, and institutional support

Private Sector Engagement:

- Create incentives and frameworks for increased private sector involvement in climate solutions across all countries.

Adaptive Governance:

- Design flexible international agreements that can be adjusted based on the latest scientific findings and changing global circumstances.

Can you answer the following question?

The global response to climate change is marked by a divergence in perspectives between developed and developing nations, particularly regarding mitigation and adaptation strategies. Discuss the main points of contention in this debate and suggest a way forward that balances the concerns of both sides while effectively addressing the climate crisis.

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