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- **Amazon Forest**
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By saurabh Pandey



Target Mains -2024/25

Q " With growing closeness between Russia china , india's depth of dilemma will increase" Discuss

प्रश्न "रूस चीन के बीच बढ़ती निकटता के साथ, भारत की दुविधा की गहराई बढ़ेगी" चर्चा करें

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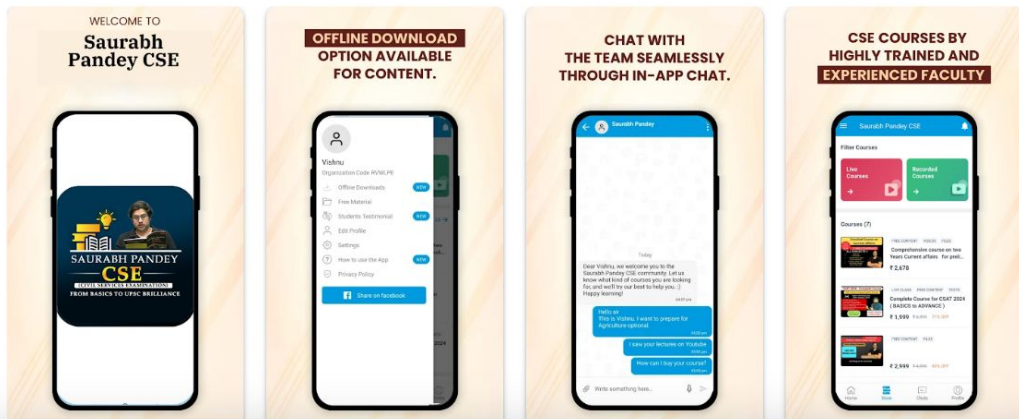
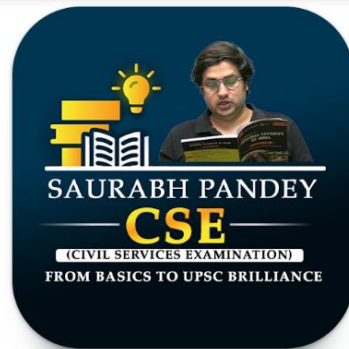
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What is the value of attributing extreme events to climate change?

Climate models are bad at capturing normal rainfall and worse at extreme ones. They are better at capturing temperatures, but only at regional scales, not at very local scales. Climate scientists need to address these challenges in the process of assigning probability changes to events in the past

Raghu Murtugudde

Just a couple of decades ago, the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) argued that individual weather events could not be attributed to climate change. The science has since evolved, albeit with all its attendant uncertainties, and now we regularly hear of researchers having been able to attribute some individual extreme events to climate change.

Many scientific and data challenges persist in this exercise even as its outcomes are argued to be usable for estimating richer countries' historic liability for climate-related "loss and damage" and the legal liability of governments and corporations in precipitating adverse events like floods and droughts. However, researchers have used a variety of methods to evaluate attribution, which raises questions about whether attribution science is mature enough to be used in courts and multilateral fora.

Value of extreme-event attribution

While no formal cost-benefit analysis of an attribution exercise has been reported, many experts have argued that attributions are critical for the 'loss and damage' (L&D) process. L&D doesn't have a unique definition but its place in climate talks under the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change has come a long way in the last decade.

Economically developing countries, in particular those that are 'particularly vulnerable', have demanded the L&D fund to pay for the havoc climate change wreaks within their borders. Obviously, the criteria by which 'particularly vulnerable' countries are to be identified are crucial.

For example, India is a developing country in the tropics and is highly vulnerable to climate change's impacts. But it is unlikely that India will qualify for L&D funding, and herein lies the rub: should climate finance and green funds focus on adaptation and mitigation alone or should they administer L&D funds separately? If the latter, then will attribution exercises help? The developed world is opposed to the idea of being held legally accountable in court for any extreme events since that could open a floodgate of lawsuits.

Against this background, our understanding of whether attribution reports can actually hold up in court as evidence of culpability is very important. A good case in point is a recently published report on heatwaves in Asia.

Attribution of Asian heatwaves

Last week, a team of climate scientists called World Weather Attribution (WWA) reported that heatwaves across Asia, from the west to the southeast, had been rendered nearly 45 times more likely by climate change.

It is worth understanding how these 'rapid extreme event attribution' are performed. The most important concept is the change in probability: in this case, the climate scientists contrasted the conditions in which the heatwaves occurred against a counterfactual world in which climate change did not happen. The conditions that prevail in the counterfactual world depend on the availability of data from our world. When there isn't enough data, the researchers



The dried-up catchment area of the Meenkar dam, in Kerala's Palakkad. K.K. MUSTHAH.

run models for the planet's climate without increasing greenhouse gas emissions and other anthropogenic forcings. Where there was sufficient data, they used trends in the data to compare conditions today with a period from the past in which human effects on the planet were relatively minimal.

This said, the data are hardly ever sufficient, especially for rainfall, and almost never for extreme rainfall events. Climate models are also notoriously bad at properly capturing normal rainfall and worse at extreme ones. Thus, climate scientists need to address these challenges in the process of assigning probability changes to events in the past. The climate models are better at capturing temperatures and temperature-related events – but again, only at regional scales, not at very local scales.

If, some day, climate scientists are able to perform reliable hyperlocal attribution exercises, they will still be confronted by a moral question: what actions should follow? Because right now, even though the L&D fund and climate jurisprudence are becoming more visible, attribution exercises are happening as if disconnected from governments' adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Put another way: will people and businesses move away if a place is seen as being a hotspot of extreme events? This is not just a question of science. Governments need to be able to respond to such decisions, and attribution science should in turn, be sufficiently reliable.

Picking extreme events to attribute

Another significant challenge in attribution exercises, is how scientists



While no formal cost-benefit analysis of an attribution exercise has been reported, many experts have argued that attributions are critical for the 'loss and damage' process.

choose the extreme events for which they will perform attribution exercises.

When evaluating the Asian heatwaves, the WWA scientists used regional scales and different definitions for different regions. They also arbitrarily considered daily, three-day, or monthly average temperatures for attributing likelihoods.

Heatwaves can be exacerbated by natural factors such as an El Niño event or human factors like urbanisation and deforestation. There is also a debate as to whether irrigation affects heatwaves as well.

Further, no weather event will occur in exactly the same form twice in a place, which means an extreme event occurring in that place will likely have no precedent. This is why it is easier to reliably attribute heatwaves at the subcontinent scale but not those at the level of particular areas.

The kind of questions that climate scientists ask also matter. For example, the same analysis can produce different answers to the questions "was the intensity of a heatwave amplified by climate change?" and "was the frequency or return period of a heatwave altered by climate change?". In the WWA report, the scientists used multiple approaches in their attribution exercise to answer the

same question, and have added that the differences between them are immaterial. It is not clear whether these differences will be perceived to be material in a court of law.

Extreme events and human action

The actual impacts of extreme events depend not only on the hazard or the extreme event but also on the vulnerability and the exposure of the population affected. Similarly, the financial consequences are also affected by multiple factors. So, should an attribution exercise only focus on the hazard or should it consider the impacts as well?

This is not a trivial question, especially if L&D negotiations are to be served reliably by attributions.

Considering all these challenges, we must take stock of the international financial aspects of adaptation, mitigation, and L&D. In particular, governments should consider an agreement on historical responsibilities to fund developing countries, close adaptation gaps, build adaptation capacity, and finance mitigation for the global good.

The real world is severely resource-constrained. In a counterfactual world where human, financial, and computational resources are infinite, attribution exercises are a beautiful scientific challenge and could serve as a productive intellectual exercise. But in the real world, we need a cost-benefit analysis based on a clear role for attribution in the overall climate action landscape.

The author is a visiting professor at ITT Bombay, and emeritus professor at the University of Maryland.

L & D WARSAW MECHANISM

- **The COP established the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts (Loss and Damage Mechanism), to address loss and damage associated with impacts of climate change, including extreme events and slow onset events, in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change at COP19 (November 2013) in Warsaw, Poland.**

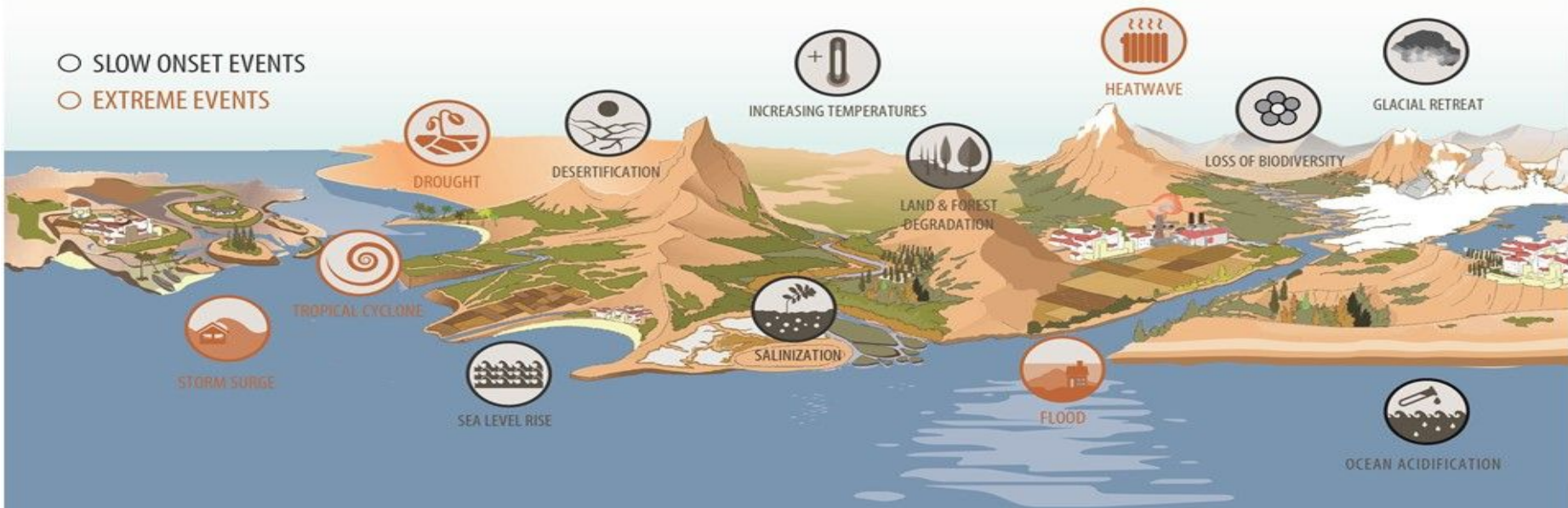
LOSS AND DAMAGE ASSOCIATED WITH THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



United Nations
Framework Convention on
Climate Change

○ SLOW ONSET EVENTS

○ EXTREME EVENTS



ECONOMIC LOSSES

NON-ECONOMIC LOSSES

©UNFCCC

INCOME

PHYSICAL ASSETS

INDIVIDUALS

SOCIETY

ENVIRONMENT



LOSS & DAMAGE



The Paris Agreement has a separate article on loss and damage, and recognises the importance of averting, minimising, and addressing loss and damage through enhancing understanding, action, and support. It provides the list of areas of co-operation and facilitation on loss and damage, as follows:



- Early-warning systems
- Emergency preparedness
- Slow onset events
- Events that may involve irreversible and permanent loss and damage
- Comprehensive risk assessment and management
- Risk insurance facilities, climate risk pooling, and other insurance solutions
- Non-economic losses
- Resilience of communities, livelihoods, and ecosystems



Steps under warsaw mechanism

1. Enhancing knowledge and understanding of comprehensive risk management approaches to address loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including slow onset impacts, by facilitating and promoting:

- **Providing leadership and coordination and, as and where appropriate, oversight under the Convention, on the assessment and implementation of approaches to address loss and damage associated with the impacts of climate change from extreme events and slow onset events associated with the adverse effects of climate change;**
- **Providing technical support and guidance on approaches to address loss and damage associated with climate change impacts, including extreme events and slow onset events;**
-



Burning vegetation in a coniferous forest in Yomama Indigenous Land, Roraima state, Brazil, occurs

Amazon fires off to record start in 2024

Reuters

Brazil's Amazon rainforest has experienced its largest blaze on record in the first four months of the year, with the environmental workers union on Monday placing partial blame on lower government spending on firefighting.

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has staked his international reputation on protecting the Amazon rainforest and restoring Brazil as a leader on climate policy.

The Amazon, the world's largest rainforest, is vital to curbing catastrophic global warming because of the vast amount of greenhouse gas it absorbs.

A record drought in the Amazon rainforest region, driven by the El Nino climate phenomenon and global warming, has helped contribute to dry conditions fueling fires this year.

More than 12,000 square kilometers of the Brazil's Amazon rainforest burned between January and April, the most in over two decades of data, according to Brazil's space research agency Inpe. That's an area larger than Qatar, or nearly the size of the U.S. state of Connecticut.

Fires in the Amazon generally do not occur naturally but are ignited by people, often seeking to clear land for agriculture.

Firefighting budget cuts are also partially to blame, environmental workers union Acsma said in a statement. They complained that this year's budget for environmental agency Ibama to fight fires is 24% lower than 2023.

In a statement, Brazil's environment ministry said that the Amazon land,

While the area burned is a record, it pales in comparison to peak dry season from August to November, when an area the same size can burn in a single month

which draws on donations from foreign governments, put 405 million reais (\$79.4 million) toward firefighting at the state level under Lula's current administration, which began in 2023.

The federal government sent about 380 firefighters to Roraima, the northern Amazon state that was hit the hardest by the fires, which were intensified by drought, the ministry said.

It did not respond to questions on cuts to Ibama's firefighting budget. The agency did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ibama agents have suspended field work since January amid tense negotiations with the federal government for better pay and working conditions.

Acsma has rejected the latest government offer and demanded larger salary rises after more than a decade of pay increases and downsizing staff.

While the area burned is a record for the first four months of the year, it pales in comparison to blazes in the peak dry season from August to November, when an area that size can burn in a single month.

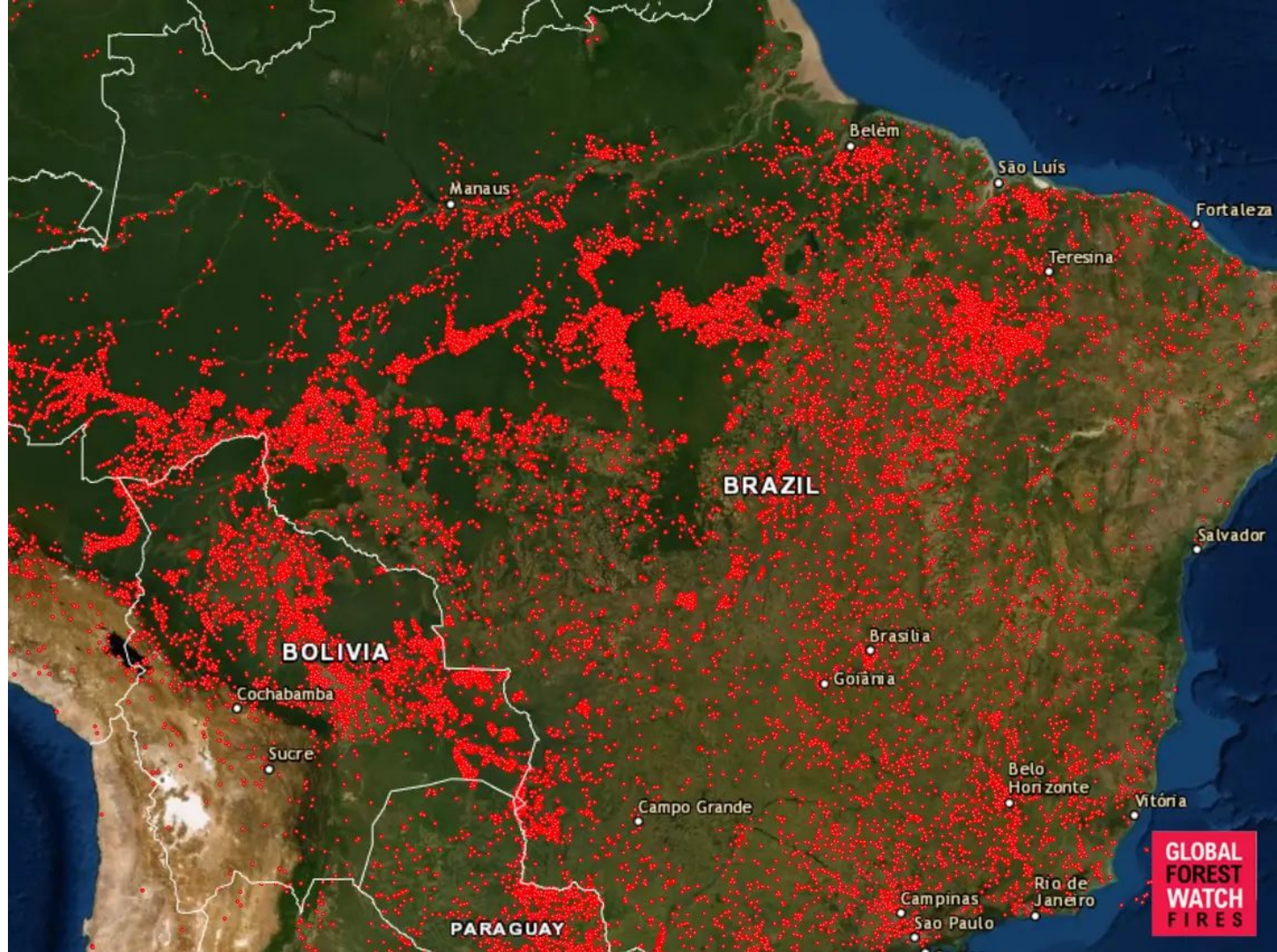
"The government needs to understand that without total engagement from environmental workers, the situation foreseen for this year is unprecedented catastrophe," said Acsma President Odeerson Zavaletti.

"Prevention efforts, such as raising awareness about ignitions, creating

Amazon Forest

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THE AMAZON

IS **ON FIRE** AND THIS IS WHAT IS AT RISK

Between
17 and **20%**
of the **planet's water**

6,7 million
km² of **FOREST**

The habitat
of more than
34 million people

10%
of the world's
BIODIVERSITY

At least
6%
of the **EARTH'S**
oxygen

- **Fires in the Amazon generally do not occur naturally but are ignited by people, often seeking to clear land for agriculture.**
- **"The government needs to understand that without total engagement from environmental workers, the situation foreseen for this year is unprecedented catastrophe**

A 'No-Limit' bromance that is not just a bilateral matter



Having met each other over 40 times in the past 11 years, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping are justified in calling each other "old friend". Yet, their Summit in Beijing (May 16-17, 2024), ostensibly to mark the 75th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations, stands out, arguably, as among their most consequential meetings. Given their geostrategic and geoeconomic hefts, their "no-limit" bromance is not just a bilateral matter. It concerns the world at large including India, which has a significant yin-yang relationship with both.

The phases of Russia-China ties

Over the past two centuries, Russia-China relations have passed through at least five phases. During the 19th century, Czarist Russia took advantage of a weak China to expand to the Pacific, and the Soviet Union continued to hold these territories. A decade of "Comintern brotherhood" followed the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, but the bonhomie was upended by ideological and geopolitical differences, triggered, in part, by the Chinese attack on India, in 1962. Russia and China had armed clashes in 1969 over the Ussuri River border dispute.

The fourth phase commenced in 1972, with United States President Richard Nixon's dramatic visit to Beijing, aimed at weaning China from the Russia-led Eastern Bloc. In a paradigm shift, China tilted towards the West which supported Deng Xiaoping's "four modernisations", believing that "prosperity would make China a more liberal society". Despite China's violent suppression of the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, the West continued to lavish China with investments, technology transfer, market access and diplomatic support over the next three decades, transforming China into the "World's Factory." Meanwhile, Moscow-Beijing ties withered as the Soviet Union imploded and the Russian Federation, its successor, shed most of its Central Asian Republics which became an arena for geo-political competition with China.

The current phase began in 2012, when China's growing assertiveness alarmed the U.S. into launching a "pivot Asia", unveiling hard-lined policies to stem China's rise and gradual economic decoupling. Growing friction with the West led China to return to Russia and the two famously declared after the Beijing Summit in February 2022 that their ties had "No Limits". Within weeks, Mr. Putin launched a "limited military operation" against Ukraine. The West responded angrily with hundreds of sanctions on Moscow to cripple Russia economically. This western blockade impelled Moscow further towards China which was also under economic pressure from the same quarters. Over the past two years, their convergence against the West has triggered a quantitative and qualitative surge in Russia-China ties. Their trade reached \$240



Mahesh Sachdev

is a former Indian Ambassador

The recent summit in Beijing between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping has both short and long-term implications

billion in 2023, having grown 26% over 2022. Russia is now predominantly dependent on China as a market for its energy exports and a source of critical inputs, such as sanctioned items and those required to pursue its Ukraine war. Russia was the largest crude supplier to China with volume averaging 2.1 million barrels a day in 2023. However, despite decoupling attempts, China traded \$575 billion with the U.S. in 2023, more than twice its trade with Russia. In comparison, India's 2023-24 annual trade with the U.S. and China was \$18 billion each; it traded \$66 billion with Russia.

The message in the joint statement

Against this backdrop, the 7,000-word Joint Statement issued after the Putin-Xi Summit was conspicuously silent on bilateral economic, financial and military ties. This taciturnity could have one of two diametrically opposite motives: it was either to avoid invoking western opprobrium and sanctions or to paper over their mutual disagreement. It is relevant to note that during a Beijing visit in April, U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken met President Xi to reportedly warn against helping Russia militarily. The joint statement also omits any India-specific issues, including the United Nations reforms, and confines treatment of Europe to a sanitised version of the Ukraine conflict.

In contrast, the text reserves the choicest invectives for the U.S., accusing it of pursuing "dual containment" (of both Russia and China, calling it "unconstructive and hostile") and an "Indo-Pacific Strategy" with "a negative impact on the peace and stability of the region". With its stark polarity, the Joint Statement is a clear sign that the two strategic partners have gone on an anti-U.S. offensive.

The Beijing Summit's likely impact needs analysis in both the short and long terms. In the short run, it may lead to intensified, albeit understated, bilateral cooperation, particularly in the supply of the dual-use materials needed by Russia for its Ukraine campaign. In return, China may seek better terms for Russian raw materials, mining rights in Siberia and access to Russian know-how on a range of critical technologies such as avionics, nuclear power and space. China may also seek greater Russian acquiescence for its dominance over Central Asia.

Beijing may even have cynical motives for quietly supporting Russia: the continuation of the Ukraine war keeps a beleaguered Russia dependent on China and the U.S. preoccupied with eastern Europe, giving China the freedom to bully Asia.

In the longer run, the summit may have an even more profound fallout. While China would want to continue its profitable economic engagements with both Russia and the West, the inherent contradictions may eventually make this pursuit untenable.

On May 17, the U.S. State Department spokesman curtly told China, "You cannot have it

both ways." The continued western pressure may force it to play the Russian card in a high-stakes global poker. This, coupled with the Middle Kingdom's incessant quest for global dominance, could usher in a new Cold War aimed mostly at creating a credible alternative to the U.S.-dominated post-Second World War global eco-political architecture. The early contours of the incipient China-driven global construct, such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the 109-member Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the 147-country, \$1 trillion outlay Belt and Road Initiative are already in place and just need ramping up. It could thus presage the opening overture of a new global polarisation.

The impact on India

The Beijing Summit would have far-reaching implications for India, presenting it with both challenges and opportunities. To begin with, India needs to carefully and objectively examine the depth and durability of the current phase of the ties between Russia and China, given their erratic past. Both have strong leaders, even as Russia's GDP is currently less than one-seventh of China's. This coupled with the Ukraine war and the sanctions makes Moscow less than an equal partner, perhaps for the first time in their bilateral history. Moscow's potential vulnerability to China's hegemony could concern India given its still overwhelming dependence on Russia for defence supplies particularly as it has border tensions with China. India being Russia's largest defence market, Moscow has an interest in retaining it. However, the reliability of Russian supplies may become subject to Chinese pressures.

While India has several reservations about the existing global architecture, it is by no means certain that Beijing's alternative would suit India better. New Delhi's best bet would perhaps be to press for a higher profile in the existing global order commensurate with India's size and potential.

In retrospect, during the last Cold War, India largely pursued the high moral ground often eschewing its core national interests. Instead of focusing on its socio-economic development and the realpolitik it required, it adopted a doctrinaire approach to Non-Alignment and Third World solidarity. The rest is history and those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

The incoming global polarisation is likely to be differently nuanced with greater flux, driven mostly by the geo-economics and quest for new technologies. Unlike the first Cold War, India is now a major global player with hard-earned "strategic autonomy" providing it with real options. India should leverage its strengths judiciously, and adopt a sharper and nimbler approach. As new opportunities dawn, it needs to be clear-headed about its core long-term national goals, adopt a commensurate strategy and pursue it with single-mindedness.

China -Russia

- **. The West responded angrily with hundreds of sanctions on Moscow to cripple Russia economically.**
- **This western blockade impelled Moscow further towards China which was also under economic pressure from the same quarters.**
- **Over the past two years, their convergence against the West has triggered a quantitative and qualitative surge in Russia-China ties.**

- **Their trade reached \$240 billion in 2023, having grown 26% over 2022.**
- **Russia is now predominantly dependent on China as a market for its energy exports and a source of critical inputs, such as sanctioned items and those required to pursue its Ukraine war.**
- **Russia was the largest crude supplier to China with volume averaging 2.1 million barrels a day in 2023**

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Concerns over voter turnout data

Why are Opposition leaders and civil society members demanding that Form 17C data, which contains the absolute number of votes polled in a booth, be published online? How has the Election Commission of India responded? Why has the Supreme Court's intervention been sought?

EXPLAINER

Anurika Bhaumik

The story so far:

The Supreme Court is slated to hear on May 24 a petition filed by the NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) seeking a direction to the Election Commission of India (ECI) to upload polling station-wise voter turnout data on its website within 48 hours of the conclusion of polling for each phase of the Lok Sabha elections.

What happened?

ADR has flagged a sizeable difference in the initial turnout figures released by the ECI soon after the conclusion of polling and the final voter percentages published subsequently. Such discrepancies have evoked sharp questions from the Opposition and civil society about the authenticity of the polling data available in the public domain and the possibility of manipulation at the counting stage. On May 20, an intervention application was also moved in the case by advocate Mehmood Pracha who contested polls from the Kamrup Lok Sabha constituency as an independent candidate. He alleged that the concerned returning officer (RO) had not furnished copies of the Form 17C record of votes polled in his constituency as mandated by the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 (DERs).

Echoing similar concerns, a group of civil society members have written to the apex poll body urging it to "immediately disclose" through its website, the authenticated record of voter turnout of every polling station as contained in Part I of Form 17C (account of votes recorded).

What is Form 17C?

As per the DERs, the ECI has to maintain two forms that have data on the number of electors and the votes polled – Forms 17A and 17C. While the former is used to record the details of every voter who comes into a polling booth and casts his or her vote, the latter is an account of all the votes recorded. Under Rule 49(2), a presiding officer is mandated to furnish a copy of the entries made in Form 17C to the polling agents of the candidates at the close of polling.

Part I of Form 17C contains crucial information – the identification numbers of the EVMs used in the polling station, the total number of electors assigned to the polling station, the total number of voters as entered in the register for voters (Form 17A), the number of voters who decided not to record their votes after signing the register, the number of voters who were not allowed to vote, the total number of test votes and votes recorded per EVM. Whereas, Part II of the same form contains the results of the counting carried out on the stipulated day.

The data in Form 17C is used by candidates to verify the results on the counting day by matching it with the EVM count. An election petition can be moved in the concerned High Court in case of any discrepancies.

Why is the ECI under the scanner?

The ECI has come under scrutiny for not releasing the absolute number of votes polled in any constituency in this general election unlike in 2019. Only voting percentages have been published but after significant delay – after 11 days of the first phase of polling held on April 19 and four days after the second phase of polling held on April 26.

On May 7, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge wrote to leaders of the



Exercising their mandate: Voters stand in queue to cast their votes during the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha polls, at a polling station in Girdidh on May 20, 2024.

INDIA bloc saying that the polling data released by the ECI "raises serious doubts". He flagged that apart from the delay, the voter turnout data released by the ECI "does not mention crucial yet related figures, such as the votes polled in each Parliamentary Constituency and in the respective Assembly Constituencies." He alleged that the "credibility of the Election Commission" was at an all-time low. He also expressed concerns that in his 52 years of electoral life, he had never witnessed such a high increment of voting percentages in the final published data. The provisional polling percentages for the first phase released by the ECI at 7 pm on April 19 was about 60% and for the second phase on April 26 was 60.96%. However, the final figures released on April 30 for the first phase stood at 66.14% (an increase of more than 5.5%) and 66.75% for the second phase (an increase of more than 5.74%).

The Congress chief further questioned what was precluding the poll body from publishing the exact voter turnout data of each polling station when such information was already available with the polling agents of the candidates through Form 17C. Since no data had been released about the number of eligible voters (electors) in each parliamentary constituency, it was impossible to calculate whether the absolute number of voters had increased or decreased, Mr. Kharge said.

TMC leader and Lok Sabha candidate for Bengal's Krishnanagar constituency, Mahua Moitra also took to the social media platform X to highlight how she was able to compile the number of voters in her constituency within 24 hours of polling. She demanded to know why the ECI had failed to publish this information for the previous phases of polling.

How has the ECI responded?

In a scathing letter to Mr. Kharge, the ECI maintained that it has no legal obligation to publish online the absolute number of votes polled in every polling station.

"Copies of Form 17C are shared with polling agents present immediately, as the strongest measure of transparency. So candidates are aware and in possession of exact voter turnout data in absolute numbers even before it is known to the ECI", the letter stipulated.

Calling the allegations by Mr. Kharge an attempt to "create confusion, misdirection and impediments in the conduct of free and fair polls", the poll body pointed out how voters continue to vote even after 6:00 pm due to long queues at polling stations resulting in variations in the estimated data on the poll day.

Notably, in an affidavit filed before the apex court, the poll body claimed that disclosure of Form 17C data could cause 'confusion in the minds of voters' since it would also include postal ballot counts. This could be "used by persons with motivated interests to cast aspersions on the whole electoral process", it alleged.

Casting aspersions on ADR's move, the ECI said that the NGO was approaching the top court with an agenda "to perpetually keep creating doubt in the mind of voters based on conspiracy theory." It also referred to ADR's unsuccessful challenge in the EVM-VVPAT cross-verification case.

What has the Supreme Court said?

The ADR has sought the Supreme Court's intervention to direct the ECI to upload scanned legible copies of Part I of Form 17C of all polling stations which contains the authenticated figures for votes polled within 48 hours of the close of polling. Saying that such information is "readily available" with the poll body, the NGO has also sought the publication of constituency and polling station-wise figures of voter turnout in absolute numbers.

The inordinate delay in the release of final voter turnout data, coupled with the unusually high revision (of over 5%) in the EC press note of April 30 and the absence of disaggregated constituency and polling

station figures in absolute numbers, has raised concerns and public suspicion regarding the correctness of the data. These apprehensions must be addressed and put to rest" the petition said.

While seeking ECI's response to the plea on May 17, Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud, heading a three-judge bench asked the poll body's counsel, "Every Polling Officer submits (voting records) by the evening, after 6 or 7 pm, by which time the polling is completed. The Returning Officer would then have the data of the entire constituency. Why don't you upload it?"

What do experts have to say?

The ECI always discloses absolute numbers of voter turnouts. This time they are only disclosing percentages, usually the turnouts are out within 24 hours of the end of polling unlike this time and the increase in voter turnout in the final figures is unusually high", Anjali Bhardwaj, Director of Common Cause earlier told *The Hindu*. She added that the poll body should upload a scanned copy of Form 17C as soon as it is submitted by the Presiding Officer to abate transparency concerns.

Addressing the ECI's assertion that access to Form 17C data by polling agents negates the need for such information to be published online, Jagdeep S. Chokkar, the founder of ADR pointed out that political parties do not contest elections in all constituencies. The renowned activist also highlighted how smaller political parties cannot afford to have polling agents in all booths or constituencies due to financial constraints. In fact, *The Hindu* found that since one constituency has roughly 2,000-2,200 booths, a candidate needs to have approximately 6,000 polling agents in each constituency to be able to obtain a copy of Form 17C. "This shows that it is impossible for smaller parties and many independent voters to have polling agents in all booths", Congress Rajya Sabha MP Shakti Singh will still able

THE GIST

ADR has flagged a sizeable difference in the initial turnout figures released by the ECI soon after the conclusion of polling and the final voter percentages published subsequently.

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The ECI maintained that it has no legal obligation to furnish to the general public information about the absolute number of votes polled in every polling station.



What is Form 17C?

- **As per the 1961 Rules, the ECI has to maintain two forms that have data on the number of electors and the votes polled — Forms 17A and 17C.**
- **While the former is used to record the details of every voter who comes into a polling booth and casts his or her vote, the latter is an account of all the votes recorded.**
- **Under Rule 49S(2), a presiding officer is mandated to furnish a copy of the entries made in Form 17C to the polling agents of the candidates at the close of polling.**

- **Part I of Form 17C contains crucial information — the identification numbers of the EVMs used in the polling station, the total number of electors assigned to the polling station, the total number of voters as entered in the register for voters (Form 17A), the number of voters who decided not to record their votes after signing the register, the number of voters who were not allowed to vote, the total number of test votes and votes recorded per EVM.**

- **Whereas, Part II of the same form contains the results of the counting carried out on the stipulated day.**
- **The data in Form 17C is used by candidates to verify the results on the counting day by matching it with the EVM count.**
- **An election petition can be moved in the concerned High Court in case of any discrepancies.**

Two U.S. asset managers introduce weight-loss Exchange Traded Funds



Reuters

Two separate asset-management firms announced the debut of exchange-traded funds (ETFs) on Tuesday, both designed to give investors exposure to stocks like Eli Lilly & Co and Novo Nordisk which are pioneers in developing new anti-obesity drugs.

Amplify ETFs said its Amplify Weight Loss Drug & Treatment ETF will track the VettaFi Weight Loss Drug & Treatment Index, while the Roundhill GLP-1 & Weight Loss ETF will be actively managed by Roundhill Investments.

The two products take slightly different approaches to building a portfolio around the new category



New trend: The number of ETFs targeting the booming segment of pharmaceutical market looks to explode. REUTERS

of medications to treat obesity, known as glucagon-like peptide-1 or GLP-1 drugs. Roundhill plans to focus squarely on pharmaceutical companies developing new drug therapies, while Amplify will include

a 30% weighting to firms involved in related businesses, such as manufacturing, analysis or distribution of these medications.

The number of ETFs targeting this booming segment of the pharmaceuti-

cal market appears to be exploding. In early 2020, Janus Henderson closed its own obesity-focused ETF, leaving investors with only broader pharmaceutical or healthcare fund options.

But last month, asset manager Tema re-branded and re-launched an ETF investing in stocks targeting cardiovascular and metabolic health.

It remains to be seen how long investors stay enthusiastic on ETFs tied to this particular trend. In the first four months of the year, ETFs designed to appeal to investors keeping tabs on trends like cybersecurity, WFH or cannabis logged outflows of \$2.4 billion compared with \$4.9 billion outflows in 2023.

Exchange traded fund

- **An exchange-traded fund (ETF) is a pooled investment security that can be bought and sold like an individual stock.**
- **ETFs can be structured to track anything from the price of a commodity to a large and diverse collection of securities.**
- **ETFs can even be designed to track specific investment strategies.**
-

- **ETF share prices fluctuate all day as the ETF is bought and sold; this is different from mutual funds, which only trade once a day after the market closes.**
- **ETFs offer low expense ratios and fewer broker commissions than buying the stocks individually.**
- **An ETF must be registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission.**

Pros and Cons of Exchange-Traded Funds



Lower costs



Diversification and risk management



Tax benefits



Easy to trade



Potentially higher costs



Limited control



Tracking error

BIMSTEC gets 'legal personality' after charter comes into force

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) will now be open to new members and observers after a historic first charter of the grouping came into force on May 20, the Ministry of External Affairs has announced.

With the charter having been adopted in the 5th summit of the BIMSTEC leaders, the grouping has acquired a 'legal personality' and will be able to enter

into structured diplomatic dialogue with other groupings and countries.

"The entry into force of the BIMSTEC Charter reaffirms India's commitment to a prosperous, peaceful and sustainable neighbourhood. BIMSTEC reflects the synthesis of our Neighbourhood First and Act East policies," External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said.

Official Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the charter will provide "legal and institutional framework for meaningful cooperation and deeper inte-

gration of the Bay of Bengal region."

Long history

BIMSTEC was formed in 1997 but for a long time, the organisation could not form consensus among its seven member states – Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Thailand, Myanmar and India – about a common charter that could sum up the vision of the grouping.

Following the pandemic, the leaders of the BIMSTEC nations met virtually on 30 March 2022 under the chairship of Sri Lanka

and adopted the charter. The chair of BIMSTEC was taken up by Thailand after the 5th leaders' summit. Last month, Nepal's parliament took up the BIMSTEC charter and ratified it which paved the way for the coming into force of charter.

The organisation received greater attention especially in the backdrop of the near moribund status of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) which last time met in Kathmandu during November 2014.

The next SAARC summit

was to be held in Islamabad in 2016 but was derailed in the backdrop of terror strikes on India that New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-based elements. Ever since, the statements emanating from the Government of Prime Minister Modi have indicated that India is willing to shift its focus from SAARC to BIMSTEC as the latter is in greater harmony with India's 'Act East' policy.

This SAARC vs BIMSTEC issue came up during the debate in parliament in Kathmandu where Foreign Minister of Nepal Narayan

Kaji Shreshtha said that Nepal does not view BIMSTEC as a replacement of SAARC saying, "In order to reinvigorate the stalled SAARC process, Nepal, as its current chair, will surely take an initiative."

In the previous decades, BIMSTEC was also marked by growing discord between Bangladesh and Myanmar which has displaced more than a million Rohingya refugees who entered Bangladesh in 2017. Similar refugees from Myanmar have also streamed into Thailand ever since the 2021 coup.

BIMSTEC

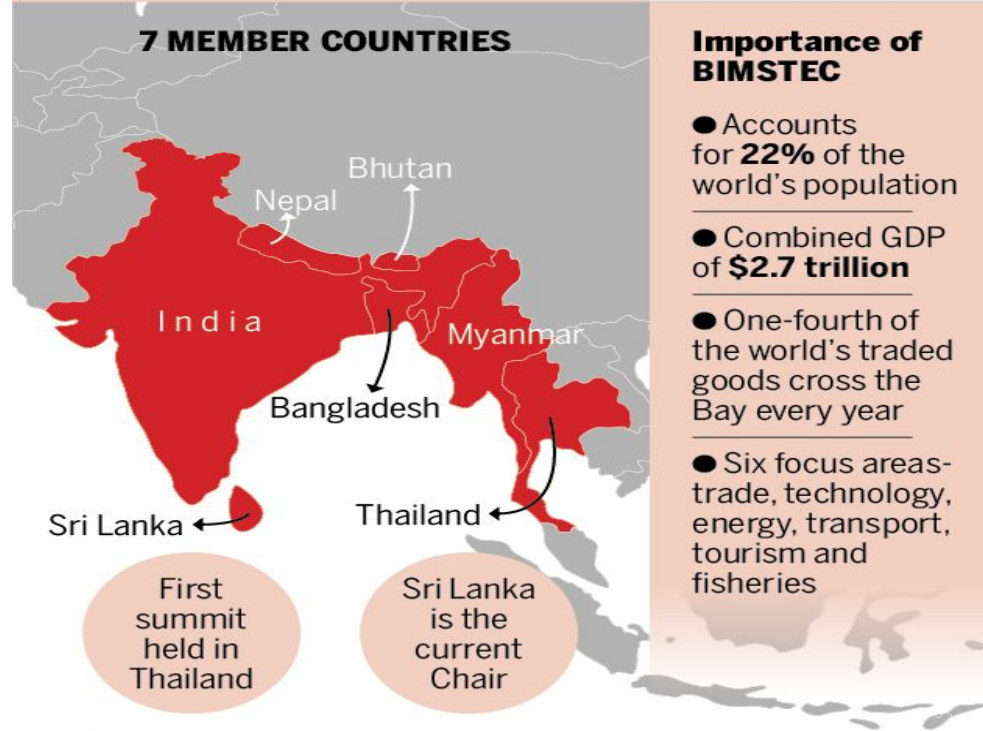
WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW



Stands for **The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation**

Founded in 1997 through **Bangkok Declaration**

7 MEMBER COUNTRIES



Importance of BIMSTEC

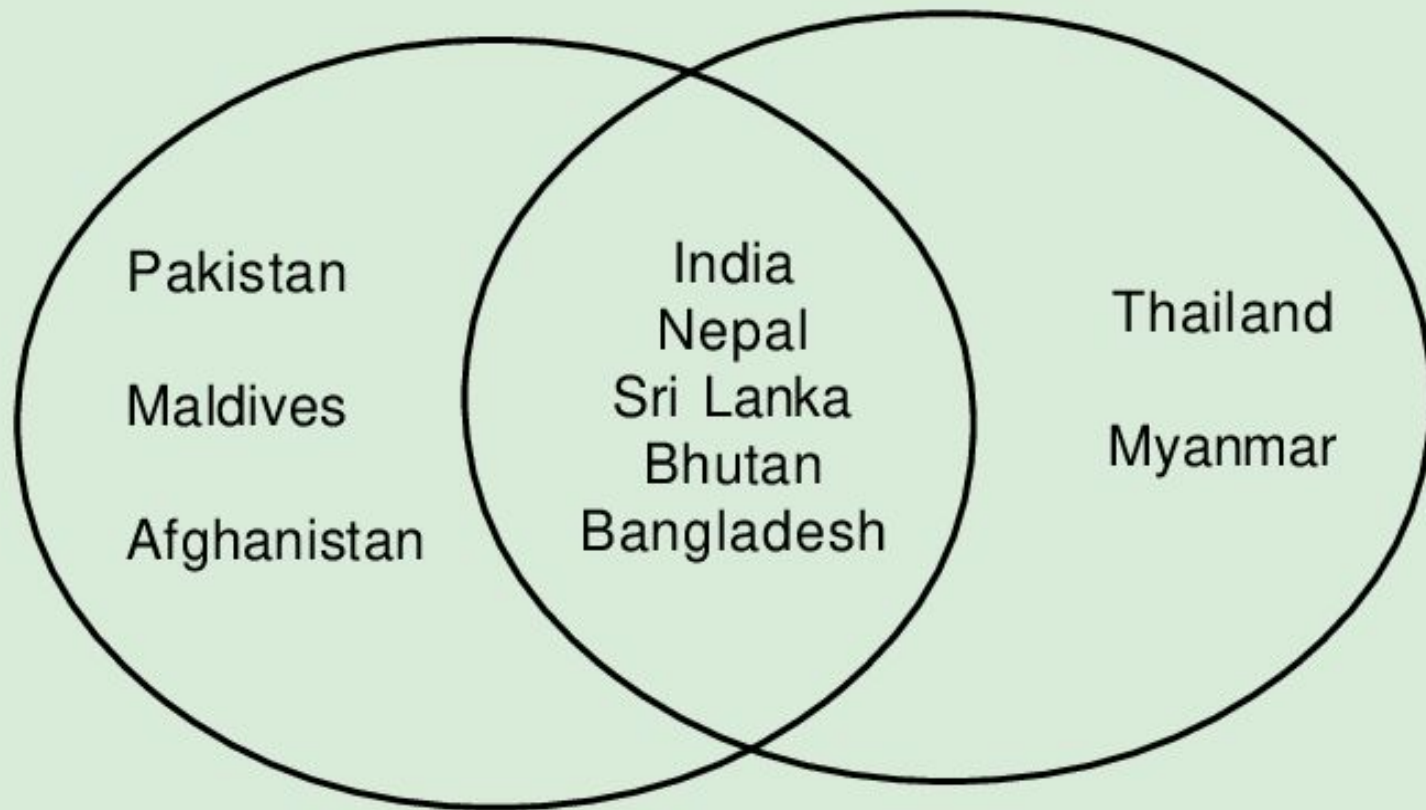
- Accounts for **22%** of the world's population
- Combined GDP of **\$2.7 trillion**
- One-fourth of the world's traded goods cross the Bay every year
- Six focus areas- trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism and fisheries

First summit held in Thailand

Sri Lanka is the current Chair

SAARC

BIMSTEC



SAARC v/s BIMSTEC

SAARC

1. A regional organisation looking into South Asia
2. Established in 1985; a product of the Cold War era
3. Member countries suffer for mistrust and suspicion
4. Suffers from regional politics
5. Asymmetric power balance
6. Intra-regional trade only 5%

BIMSTEC

1. Interregional organisation connecting South Asia and South East Asia
2. Established in 1997 in the post-Cold War
3. Members maintain reasonably friendly relations
4. Core objective is the improvement of economic cooperation among countries
5. Balancing of power with the presence of Thailand and India on the bloc
6. Intra-regional trade has increased around 6 percent in a decade

South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) members are India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Maldives, Bhutan and Afghanistan

BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) members are Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan

- **The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) will now be open to new members and observers after a historic □first charter of the grouping came into force.**
- **With the charter having been adopted in the 5th summit of the BIMSTEC leaders, the grouping has acquired a ‘legal personality’ and will be able to enter into structured diplomatic dialogue with other groupings and countries.**

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