



In climate change noise, India's role as conductor

New Delhi needs to introduce equity, differentiation and justice in the 'net-zero' debate.

Net Zero Debate and India:

1. Climate action and climate leadership are being increasingly measured against a planetary imperative of emissions-reducing to net-zero by 2050.
2. This presents a conundrum for fast-growing developing countries such as India. They need the carbon space to develop but they are also among the most vulnerable countries to climate change. We need an equitable way to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions for the planet.
3. Ambitious renewable energy targets, improvements in energy efficiency and fast penetration of electric vehicles are among India's critical low-carbon objectives in the next decade.
4. Yet, rapid advances in these do not substitute for the need to set a clear direction of travel with the aim to reduce emissions to net-zero. Avoiding this choice makes India look like a climate laggard when its actions actually speak louder than the words of many developed countries.

India needs to replan

1. India should, instead, reframe the net-zero debate from the perspective of the planet and for the prosperity of its people. India had ensured that "climate justice" was inserted in the preamble to the Paris Agreement.
2. As the climate crisis unfolds, climate justice should imply that humanity respects the planetary boundary of permissible greenhouse gases but also ensures that countries assume equitable responsibility based on their past and future emissions.
3. A formulation that combines per capita income and aggregate emissions can be devised for fixing net-zero targets. The World Bank classifies a high-income economy as one with gross national per capita income of \$12,536 or



more in 2019 prices. Any high-income country should not get more than 15-20 years to achieve net-zero emissions from 2020 onwards.

4. This would imply that the European Union or the United States reach net-zero no later than 2035-40, rather than 2050 as they currently propose.
5. China will enter this income category after 2025, so it should achieve net-zero by 2045, rather than 2060 as it proposes. India is expected to become a high-income economy around 2050, and it should target net-zero close to 2070.
6. As a recent Council on Energy, Environment and Water report shows, today's high-income countries would still have a much longer transition period between peaking emissions and net-zero than India would get.

BIMSTEC needs to reinvent itself

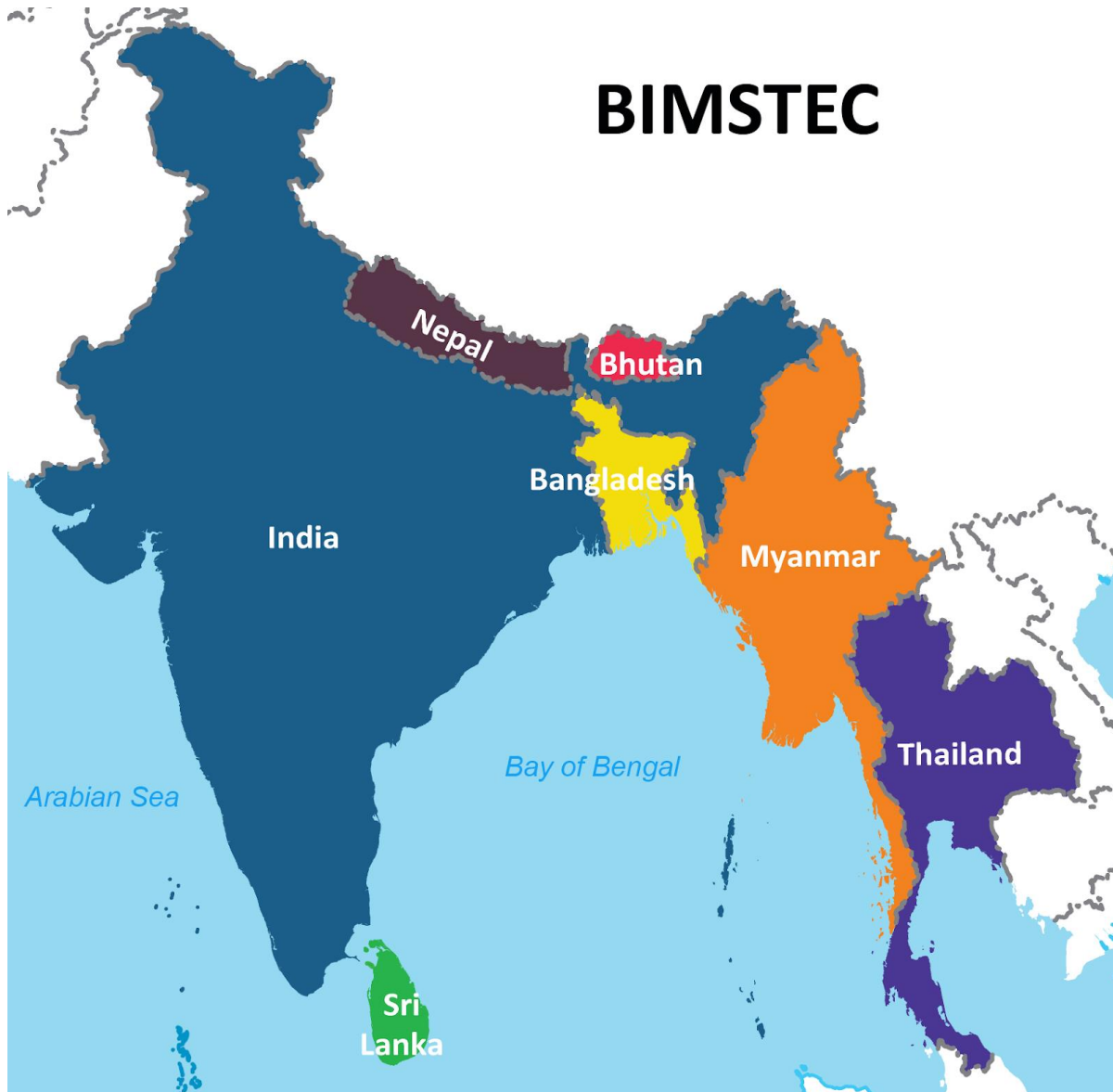
The foreign ministers of BIMSTEC (the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) met virtually on April 1.

The Bangkok Declaration

Established as a grouping of four nations — India, Thailand, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka — through the Bangkok Declaration of 1997 to promote rapid economic development, BIMSTEC was expanded later to include three more countries — Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan.

Recent decisions

1. Two and a half years after the Kathmandu Summit 2018, the grouping stands ready to move forward. The foreign ministers cleared the draft for the BIMSTEC charter, recommending its early adoption.
2. The ministers also conveyed their support for the Master Plan for Transport Connectivity, which will be adopted at the next summit.



The BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement

1. What has been missing from recent deliberations is a reference to the lack of progress on the trade and economic dossier.
2. A January 2018 study by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry had suggested that BIMSTEC urgently needed a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement to be a real game-changer.



3. Ideally, it should cover trade in goods, services and investment; promote regulatory harmonisation; adopt policies that develop regional value chains, and eliminate non-tariff barriers.
4. Also lacking was an effort to enthuse and engage the vibrant business communities of these seven countries, and expand their dialogue, interactions and transactions.

Other Areas:

In contrast, much has been achieved in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and security, including counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and coastal security cooperation. India has led through constant focus and follow-up — to the extent that some member-states have complained about the ‘over-securitisation’ of BIMSTEC. The trick to ensuring the balance is not to go slow on security but to accelerate the pace of forging solid arrangements for economic cooperation.

Challenges:

1. First, a strong BIMSTEC presupposes cordial and tension-free bilateral relations among all its member-states. This has not been the case, given the trajectory of India-Nepal, India-Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh-Myanmar ties in recent years.
2. Second, uncertainties over SAARC hovers, complicating matters. Both Kathmandu and Colombo want the SAARC summit revived, even as they cooperate within BIMSTEC, with diluted zeal.
3. Third, China’s decisive intrusion in the South-Southeast Asian space has cast dark shadows.
4. Finally, the military coup in Myanmar, brutal crackdown of protesters and continuation of popular resistance resulting in a protracted impasse have produced a new set of challenges.

BIMSTEC needs a paradigm shift in raising the level of cooperation and regional integration. The grouping also needs to reinvent itself, possibly even rename itself as ‘The Bay of Bengal Community’. It should consider holding regular annual summits. Only then will its leaders convince the region about their strong commitment to the new vision they have for this unique platform linking South Asia and Southeast Asia.