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BIMSTEC Heads Invited to PM's Swearing-in

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India has **invited leaders of the seven BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) **nations** for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in ceremony on May 30. The President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Sooronbay Jeenbekov and the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Pravind Jugnauth are also the invitees.

- **Kyrgyzstan** has been invited as a **current chair of SCO** (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) and **Mauritius** is a key link in the plan to set up a **chain of military installations in the Indian Ocean**.
- According to available information, **the Prime Minister of Pakistan is not on the list of invitees**.
- India had invited leaders of all the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) countries in the last swearing-in ceremony of the Prime Minister.

Why BIMSTEC and not SAARC?

- India has **shifted the focus to BIMSTEC since the last SAARC Summit**, which was scheduled to be held in Islamabad in November 2016, stalled after India and several other countries pulled out due to terror-related concerns.
 - The souring of ties with Pakistan has led the government to avoid the SAARC umbrella in order to ensure **Islamabad is excluded**.
 - BIMSTEC has Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand besides India.
 - SAARC includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka

- The **culmination of both India's 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East'** happens in the region of the Bay of Bengal.
 - India's **Neighbourhood first policy** means working with neighbours in a way so that both sides feel their interests are being advanced. Through this policy, **India wants to improve its ties with its immediate neighbours.**
 - India's **Act East Policy focuses on the extended neighbourhood in the Asia-Pacific region.** It provides an interface between North East India including the state of Arunachal Pradesh and the ASEAN region.