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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. BIMSTEC needs a paradigm shift in raising the level of cooperation and regional integration. Discuss.

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Approach

- Start the answer by mentioning the context of importance of BIMSTEC.
- Mention the major roadblocks in bimstec integration.
- Conclude Suitably.

Introduction

BIMSTEC as a regional organization, has been an important priority in India's foreign policy. In recent times, it has achieved a lot in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and security, including counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and coastal security cooperation. However, there are many obstacles that limit the regional body in realizing its full potential.

Body

Major Roadblocks in BIMSTEC Integration

- **Unfinished Economic Agenda:** BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement, was signed in 2004, but over 20 rounds of negotiations it is still to be operationalized.
- **Internal Tussle:** A strong BIMSTEC presupposes cordial and tension-free bilateral relations among all its member-states.
However, given the trajectory of India-Nepal, India-Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh-Myanmar ties in recent years, this has not been the case.
- **China's Intrusion:** China's decisive intrusion in the South-Southeast Asian space is causing a limiting effect on India's zone of influence.
Recently, a renowned Bangladeshi scholar argued at a recent conference that BIMSTEC would make progress if China is accepted as its principal interlocutor and partner.
- **Myanmar Coup:** The recent military coup in Myanmar, brutal crackdown of protesters, and continuation of popular resistance resulting in a protracted impasse have produced a new set of border management challenges for India and Bangladesh.

Way Forward

- **BIMSTEC FTA:** In order to increase regional integration, BIMSTEC urgently needed a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement.
It should cover trade in goods, services, and investment; promote regulatory harmonization; adopt policies that develop regional value chains, and eliminate non-tariff barriers.

- **Balancing Security & Economy:** Some member-states have complained about the 'over securitization of BIMSTEC. Hence, there is a need to ensure maintaining security and forging solid arrangements for economic cooperation.
- **Gujral Doctrine:** India would have to counter the impression that BIMSTEC is an India-dominated bloc, in that context India can follow the Gujral doctrine that intends to chalk out the effect of transactional motive in bilateral relations.

Conclusion

As BIMSTEC readies itself to celebrate the silver jubilee of its formation next year, it faces a serious challenge: to effect “a paradigm shift in raising the level of our cooperation and regional integration.”