



## Reviving Neighbourhood First Policy

### What is the issue?

\n\n

- \n
- South Asian relations are facing tough time due to India-Pakistan rivalry, China-Pakistan proximity and India-China hostility.
- \n
- A paradigm shift in South Asia's regional integration strategy is required to address such issues.
- \n

\n\n

### How is India's neighbourhood at present?

\n\n

- \n
- Politics and religion aside, across India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (IPB) there are common socio-cultural bonds.
- \n
- People-to-people connectivity remains positive.
- \n
- The remaining five i.e. Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan are paying the price of regional disintegration.
- \n
- This is possibly caused by unresolved puzzles having roots in the China-IPB (CIPB) axis.
- \n
- There are cross-border barriers and lack of transport facilitation among IPB.
- \n
- This is leading to freight movement taking place along expensive routes, escalating the investment cost.
- \n
- The Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) has a sluggish progress in infrastructural development.

\n

- Pakistan-Bangladesh relations and the India-China tug of war over Bangladesh are increasing in recent times.

\n

\n\n

### **What is the significance of IPB?**

\n\n

\n

- IPB account for approximately 95% of South Asia's GDP and population.
- Along with China, they account for 18.5% of global GDP and 41% of global population.
- South Asia's intra-regional trade, currently 5% of total trade, can grow to \$80 billion from the current \$28 billion, huge share being within IPB.
- Pakistan and India have potential trade capacity of \$20 billion compared to the current \$3 billion.
- If IPB can have a strategic partnership factoring China, the remaining five can effortlessly fit into positive regionalism with a win-win situation for all.

\n

\n\n

### **What are the challenges before IPB?**

\n\n

\n

- The supply-demand gap of **power** in IPB is estimated to be around 18,000 MW.
- Besides, by 2050, China, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh will also experience **water** shortages.
- India and China are leading globally in terms of **Internet** and smartphone users.
- But Internet penetration for these four countries is below 55%, indicating the untapped potential.
- IPB fails to attract sufficient **tourists** due to poor civil aviation connectivity, complex regulations and lack of visa liberalisation procedures.

\n

- Movement of trucks across the international frontier is limited by absence of **cross-border agreements** between India and Bangladesh, and India and Pakistan.

\n

- **Rail connectivity** is restricted due to technical problems of different gauges, track structures, signalling and so forth.

\n

\n\n

## **What measures need to be taken?**

\n\n

\n

- **Multilateral Co-operations** - The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is being developed as a bilateral initiative.

\n

- However, if Indian sensitivities can be addressed, it can be a multilateral project.

\n

- Combined efforts of BCIM, CPEC and the proposed China-Nepal-India (CNI) Economic Corridor under BRI, can capitalise on regional economic potential.

\n

- **Infra Projects** - Synergetic integration of the economic corridors with other BRI projects can accelerate inward investment into IPB.

\n

- Developing transport, logistics services and bureaucratic procedures between India-Bangladesh are essential.

\n

- This can contribute to the cross border trade growth between the two by 300%.

\n

- **Renewable Energy** - To unravel the full potential, energy treaties based on renewable sources have become imperative.

\n

- Greater electricity generation and utilisation of domestic energy endowments along with connectivity are significant to capitalise on the regional energy potential.

\n

\n\n

\n

- **Water sharing** - The three largest trans-boundary river basins, Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra, are all within CIPB.

\n

\n\n

\n

- China has expressed interest to pursue water- sharing treaties.
- IPB could thus come together in a collaborative framework to boost the livelihoods of millions across the region.
- **Digital transformation** - Digital connectivity can act as the gateway to a holistic transformation of the region via the CIPB conduit.
- If these opportunities are tapped, it would enhance mobility of both tourists and students.
- Thus a strategic collaboration, looking beyond historical animosity and misgivings, can unlock a new era of regionalism whose benefits far outweigh negatives.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

**Source: The Hindu**

\n



**IAS PARLIAMENT**  
*Information is Empowering*

A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative