



Daily Current Affairs



To The Point by Dhananjay Gautam

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1 24th BIMSTEC Senior Officials Meeting: Strengthening Regional Ties

Context: India actively participated in the **24th Senior Officials Meeting of BIMSTEC**, reaffirming its commitment to fostering regional growth and cooperation.

India's Strategic Vision for BIMSTEC:

India emphasized its dedication to building a **robust, vibrant, and prosperous Bay of Bengal region**. Its commitment aligns with:

- **Neighbourhood First Policy**
- **Vision SAGAR** (*Security and Growth for All in the Region*)
- **Act East Policy**

Key Meeting Highlights:

- Reviewed progress since March 2023.
- Discussed critical areas like **sustainable development, connectivity, security, and people-to-people exchanges**.
- Finalized plans for **regional cooperation**, new mechanisms, and external partnerships.

About BIMSTEC:

Establishment and Evolution:

- **Founded:** June 6, 1997, through the **Bangkok Declaration**.
- **Original Name:** BIST-EC (*Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation*).
- **Members:** Began with four members (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand). Later expanded to include **Myanmar** (1997) and **Bhutan and Nepal** (2004).
- **Focus Areas:** Started with six sectors—**trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism, and fisheries**—later expanded to include **public health, counter-terrorism, climate change**, and more by 2008.

Objective:

To foster **economic cooperation** among countries bordering the Bay of Bengal.

Significance of BIMSTEC:

Reviving Regional Cooperation

Once a highly integrated region, the **Bay of Bengal** lost its connectivity post-independence. BIMSTEC aims to rekindle this shared integration.

Sector-Based Collaboration:

Unlike SAARC or ASEAN, BIMSTEC adopts a **sector-driven approach**, with cooperation areas divided among members.

- **India's Role:** Leads initiatives in **transportation, tourism, and counter-terrorism**.

Alignment with India's Policies:

- Aligns with India's **Act East Policy** and Indo-Pacific objectives.
- Became India's primary regional platform after shifting focus from **SAARC** post the 2016 Uri attack.



**Trade and Connectivity Potential:**

- Significant potential for **land and maritime trade**.
- Challenges exist in developing **transborder trade, maritime shipping**, and a **shared coastal framework**.

Challenges and Roadblocks:**Slow Progress:**

- **Lack of Efficiency:** Delayed implementation of initiatives.
- **Financial Constraints:** BIMSTEC Secretariat faces resource and manpower limitations.

Political Instabilities:

- Internal conflicts like the **Rohingya crisis, India-Nepal border tensions**, and **Myanmar's political turmoil** hinder cooperation.

Underutilized Maritime Resources:

- The **Bay of Bengal**, critical for livelihoods, has seen limited collaboration on **coastal shipping and fisheries management**.

The Road Ahead for BIMSTEC:

The organization's progress mirrors the **complex geopolitical landscape** of the region. While challenges persist, BIMSTEC's:

- **Sector-driven model**
- **Growing institutional strength** position it as a vital player in shaping the region's future.

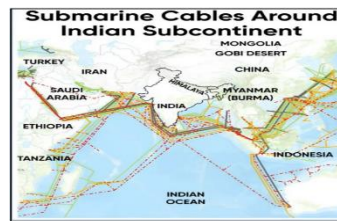
With **sustained cooperation and dedication**, BIMSTEC could lead the Bay of Bengal region toward a **prosperous, secure, and stable future**, contributing significantly to the larger Indo-Pacific framework.

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India's Expanding Undersea Cable Network: Bridging Continents

Context: The launch of the **India Asia Xpress (IAX)** and **India Europe Xpress (IEX)** undersea cables marks a significant milestone in India's digital journey. These advanced cables aim to bolster connectivity across **Asia** and **Europe**, catering to the country's rising data demands and digital ambitions.



Key Connections:

- **India Asia Xpress (IAX):** Links **Chennai** and **Mumbai** with **Singapore**, **Thailand**, and **Malaysia**.
- **India Europe Xpress (IEX):** Connects **Chennai** and **Mumbai** with **France**, **Greece**, **Saudi Arabia**, **Egypt**, and **Djibouti**.

What Are Undersea Cables?

- **Definition:** These are **fiber optic cables** laid along the ocean floor to enable international **internet** and **telecommunication** connectivity.
- **Global Backbone:** Carry approximately **99% of international internet traffic**, forming the backbone of the global digital ecosystem.
- **Installation:** Laid using specialized ships that ensure cables avoid obstacles and are robust against environmental conditions.
- **UNGA Recognition:** Recognized as "**critical communication infrastructure**" in 2010.
- **Threats:** Prone to damage from fishing, anchoring, natural disasters like **earthquakes** and **tsunamis**, and even marine animals.

Significance of India's Network Expansion:

1. **Geopolitical Influence:**
 - Strengthens India's strategic presence in the **Indo-Pacific region**.
 - Enhances regional influence in the **Bay of Bengal** and **South China Sea**.
2. **Security and Stability:**
 - Proactive in addressing the vulnerability of undersea cables to **physical damage** and **cyberattacks**.
3. **Emerging Leader:**
 - Positions India as a key player in the global undersea cable ecosystem, fostering connectivity and resilience.

Challenges and Solutions:

- **Disruptions:** Recent cable failures highlight the need for **alternative routes** and **redundant systems**.
- **Choke Points:** Dependence on critical locations like the **Malacca Strait** exposes vulnerabilities.
- **Domestic Resilience:** Strengthening internal infrastructure ensures uninterrupted services during international outages.

Understanding Optical Fibers:

- **Definition:** Thin strands of pure glass or plastic used for transmitting data as **light pulses**.



- **Working Principle:** Operates on **Total Internal Reflection (TIR)**, where light is continuously reflected within the fiber, ensuring minimal data loss.

Advantages of Optical Fibers:

- **High Bandwidth:** Transmits vast amounts of data compared to copper wires.
- **Low Signal Loss:** Enables long-distance data transmission with minimal loss.
- **Lightning Speed:** Utilizes the speed of light for fast communication.
- **Interference-Free:** Immune to electromagnetic disturbances, ensuring signal clarity.

Applications of Optical Fibers:

- **Telecommunications:** Backbone of **high-speed internet** and telephony.
- **Medical Imaging:** Used in **endoscopes** for internal body examinations.
- **Data Centers:** Integral to server and storage device connectivity.
- **Sensors:** Utilized for measuring **temperature, pressure**, and other variables.

Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany: Father of Fiber Optics:

- **Pioneer:** Demonstrated how light could be transmitted through **curved glass fibers**.
- **Legacy:** His groundbreaking work laid the foundation for today's advanced fiber optic technology.

India's ambitious undersea cable projects reflect its determination to strengthen global digital connectivity while emerging as a strategic hub in the evolving digital world. With innovations in optical fiber technology and a focus on resilience, India is set to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of global communication networks.

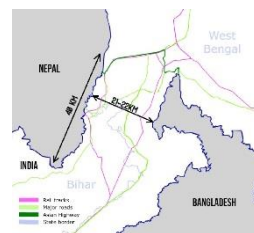
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3 Siliguri Corridor: India's Strategic Lifeline

Context: The **Union Home Minister** has emphasized the importance of the **Siliguri Corridor** as a critical link connecting Northeast India to the rest of the country. The presence of the **Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)** in this area reinforces national security and instills confidence across the nation.

Understanding the Siliguri Corridor

The **Siliguri Corridor**, often referred to as the **Chicken's Neck**, is a slender stretch of land located in **West Bengal**.



- It connects India's **Northeastern States** to the mainland.
- Geographically, it lies between the **Mahananda River** and the **Teesta River**.
- Strategically, it is of immense importance due to its proximity to the international borders of **China, Nepal**, and **Bangladesh**.

Significance of the Siliguri Corridor

1. Geopolitical Importance:

- Acts as the **only land bridge** between mainland India and the Northeast.
- Ensures connectivity and regional integration.

2. Military and Security:

- Vital for **defense operations** and the movement of armed forces.
- Provides a strategic edge due to its location near international borders.

3. Trade and Transportation:

- Serves as a crucial route for transporting goods and people between the **Northeast** and the rest of India.
- Facilitates **cross-border trade** with neighboring countries like **Bangladesh** and **Bhutan**.

4. **Strategic Vulnerability:** With a width of just **22 kilometers** at its narrowest point, the corridor is susceptible to blockades, making it a focal point for **infrastructure and security enhancements**.

Why Securing the Siliguri Corridor is Critical:

1. **Strategic Connectivity:** Any disruption could isolate the **Northeast**, severely affecting the supply of goods, services, and military aid.
2. **Military Considerations**
 - Its proximity to the borders with **China, Nepal**, and **Bangladesh** demands robust defense measures.
 - Ensures **unhindered movement** of troops during conflicts.
3. **Geopolitical Sensitivity**
 - The corridor's narrow geography makes it a potential target for adversaries.
 - Protecting it prevents foreign powers from exploiting the region.
4. **Economic Stability:** The corridor supports economic activities like **cross-border trade**, ensuring access to vital resources.
5. **Internal Security:** Safeguarding the corridor deters external influences from destabilizing the **Northeast** and upholds **national unity**.

Conclusion : The **Siliguri Corridor** is more than just a geographic link; it is a strategic asset that upholds **India's sovereignty, economic stability**, and **national integration**. Strengthening its security and infrastructure remains paramount for safeguarding India's interests in the **Northeast** and ensuring resilience against potential threats

4

Centre Tightens Rules to Restrict Access to Election Documents

Context: The Central Government has amended **Rule 93 of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961**, limiting public access to specific election-related documents. This move, initiated by the **Ministry of Law and Justice** at the request of the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**, aims to safeguard voter privacy and prevent misuse of sensitive electronic data. However, it has sparked debates over its impact on transparency in the electoral process.



Key Changes in the Rules:

1. Restricted Access to Documents:

- **Old Rule:** Allowed public access to all election-related "papers."
- **New Rule:** Limits access to documents explicitly mentioned in the rules, excluding **electronic records** such as **CCTV footage**, **webcasting clips**, and **video recordings**.

2. Scope of Exclusions:

- Essential records like **nomination forms**, **results**, and **election account statements** remain accessible.
- Sensitive electronic materials are excluded to prevent potential misuse.

Reasons Behind the Amendment:

- Legal Context:** The change was prompted by a **Punjab and Haryana High Court** order that directed the provision of all election-related documents, including electronic data, during a case.
- Preventing Misuse:**
 - **Election Commission of India** raised concerns over the misuse of **electronic records**, especially through emerging technologies like **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**.
 - Risks include breaches of voter privacy and potential intimidation, particularly in sensitive regions such as **Jammu and Kashmir** and **Naxal-affected areas**.
- Candidate Safeguards:** Candidates retain access to critical election materials, including **CCTV footage**, ensuring fairness in contestation. Non-candidates, however, must obtain court permission for access.

Criticism and Concerns:

1. Reduced Transparency:

- Critics argue that limiting access to documents like **observer reports** and **Presiding Officer diaries** undermines public oversight of the electoral process.
- Activists, including **Venkatesh Nayak**, emphasize the importance of transparency for ensuring election fairness.

2. Political Allegations:

- Opposition parties have accused the government of diluting electoral integrity.
- **Congress leader Jairam Ramesh** labeled the amendment as anti-democratic and called for legal action to restore transparency.

Significance of the Move:

- Enhanced Security:** Protects voter anonymity and reduces risks in politically sensitive areas.



2. **Transparency Trade-offs:** While it prioritizes security, the amendment raises questions about maintaining trust in the electoral process.

Legal Framework and Impact:

1. **Conduct of Election Rules, 1961**
 - Governs election-related processes and transparency.
 - The amendment redefines the scope of accessible election documents.
2. **Challenges to Cooperative Federalism:** The move has implications for maintaining credibility in elections across central and state levels.
3. **Potential Legal Challenges:** Opposition parties and activists plan to contest the changes in court, citing transparency as vital to democratic principles.

Conclusion and Way Forward:

The amendment reflects the government's efforts to **modernize election security** while addressing concerns over **transparency**. Striking a balance between these two priorities is essential to foster trust in the electoral system. Introducing mechanisms such as **outcome-based transparency measures** could ensure both voter privacy and public confidence in the electoral process.



5 Automated & Intelligent Machine-aided Construction (AIMC) System

Context: The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) is set to deploy **intelligent machines** for constructing **National Highways** to ensure faster, more durable, and efficient road infrastructure. With a current highway network spanning **1.46 lakh km**, and plans to add **45,000 km by 2047**, the government aims to revolutionize road construction with the **Automated & Intelligent Machine-aided Construction (AIMC) System**.



What is AIMC?

The **AIMC System** represents an innovative step toward smarter road construction by integrating **automated machinery** and **real-time data sharing**. This cutting-edge system is designed to tackle inefficiencies in traditional road construction methods, enhance productivity, and improve the quality and longevity of roads.

Objectives of AIMC

1. **Boost Productivity:** Streamline construction processes with modern technologies.
2. **Improve Durability:** Build roads that are **long-lasting** and require minimal maintenance.
3. **Reduce Post-Construction Delays:** Minimize the need for traditional surveys and reduce project timelines.
4. **Address Current Challenges:** Overcome inefficiencies such as outdated tools, lack of data coordination, and subpar contractor performance.

Types of AIMC Machines:

1. **GPS-Aided Motor Grader (3D Machine Control Technology):**
 - Equipped with **Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS)** technology and angle sensors.
 - Ensures precision by aligning the grader's blade with **digital design plans**.
 - Processes data in **real-time** for accurate and efficient road alignment.
2. **Intelligent Compaction Roller (IC Roller):**
 - Reduces the risk of post-construction issues like **air pockets** or **water voids** in materials.
 - Prevents structural damage to roads and enhances their durability.
3. **Single Drum/Tandem Vibratory Roller:** Ensures proper **soil and base layer compaction**, which is essential for stable and robust roads.

Why AIMC Matters:

- **Faster Project Completion:** Accelerates the pace of highway construction, crucial for meeting future infrastructure demands.
- **Enhanced Road Quality:** Creates highways that can withstand heavy usage and adverse conditions.
- **Technological Advancement:** Brings India's highway construction on par with global standards by integrating modern machinery.

The Road Ahead:

The **AIMC System** signifies a transformative approach to infrastructure development, ensuring that **India's highways** are not just **longer**, but also **smarter and stronger**. By embracing **automation** and **intelligent machines**, the government is paving the way for a **resilient and sustainable road network** that will drive India's growth for decades to come.

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6 Why is the Indian Rupee Weakening Against the US Dollar?

Context: The **exchange rate** is the value of one currency compared to another. For example, if **Rs. 85 = \$1** today, it shows how much one US dollar is worth in Indian rupees. In 2014, the exchange rate was **Rs. 61 = \$1**, highlighting how currencies fluctuate based on various factors.



What Influences Currency Exchange Rates?

Currencies behave similarly to commodities—their value is determined by **demand** and **supply**. When demand for a particular currency exceeds supply, its value rises, and vice versa.

Key Factors Driving the Value of the Indian Rupee

1. Higher Demand for USD:

- When **Indians** need more **US dollars** than **Americans** need Indian rupees, the US dollar strengthens, and the Indian rupee weakens.
- Daily fluctuations:** Consistently higher demand for USD results in the continued **depreciation of the INR**.

2. Trade Imbalance:

- If India imports more goods from the US than it exports, the demand for USD rises, weakening the rupee.
- Similarly, if Indians purchase more **US services** (e.g., tourism) than Americans buy from India, the demand for INR decreases, further weakening the currency.

3. Investment Flows:

- More US investments in India** cause the INR to appreciate.
- Indian investments in the US** tend to weaken the INR as more rupees are exchanged for dollars.

Other Factors Affecting the INR/USD Exchange Rate:

- Trade Imbalances:** For example, **high US tariffs on Indian goods** reduce demand for the INR, pushing the rupee lower.
- Inflation:** If inflation is higher in India compared to the US, the rupee's purchasing power decreases, leading to depreciation.
- Capital Outflows:** Investors pulling their money out of India, attracted by better returns in the US (such as higher interest rates or lower inflation), lead to a weaker INR.

Current Scenario: What's Behind the Rupee's Decline?

The Indian rupee has recently breached **85/\$1**, compared to **83 in April 2024**. Contributing factors include:

- Trade Deficits:** India is importing more than it exports, increasing demand for USD.
- Rising Inflation:** Inflation in India is higher than in the US, eroding the rupee's value.
- Capital Flight:** Investors are pulling funds out of India, preferring the stability of US markets.

Conclusion: A Complex Issue

The decline in the Indian rupee reflects a mix of **trade imbalances**, **inflation disparities**, and **capital outflows**. To stabilize the rupee, India must address these underlying issues by boosting exports, controlling inflation, and attracting more foreign investments.

Types of Exchange Rates:

Type	Features	Importance
Fixed Exchange Rate	Set by central banks; less volatile.	Provides stability but lacks flexibility.
Floating Exchange Rate	Determined by market forces; highly volatile.	Reflects real-time economic conditions.
NEER (Nominal Effective Exchange Rate)	A weighted average of exchange rates; no inflation adjustment.	Measures currency strength relative to trading partners.
REER (Real Effective Exchange Rate)	Adjusts NEER for inflation differences.	Indicates trade competitiveness.

Difference Between Appreciation, Depreciation, and Devaluation:

Aspect	Appreciation	Depreciation	Devaluation
Definition	Currency value increases.	Currency value decreases.	Central bank deliberately reduces value.
System	Floating exchange rate.	Floating exchange rate.	Fixed/semi-fixed exchange rate.
Cause	Driven by market forces (demand/supply).	Driven by market forces (demand/supply).	A policy decision by the central bank.
Impact on Exports	Makes exports more expensive.	Makes exports cheaper.	Makes exports cheaper.
Impact on Imports	Makes imports cheaper.	Makes imports more expensive.	Makes imports more expensive.

The **Indian rupee's weakness** against the US dollar underscores the need for strategic measures to restore balance in trade, investments, and inflation.