



STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF BIMSTEC: ROUTE TO ASIAN UNION

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Abstract

This paper investigates the potential of BIMSTEC in the Asian integration process. Except for the use of neo-functionalist integration strategies in the BIMSTEC integration scheme, previous literature examined BIMSTEC from multiple perspectives. This research aims to analyse the integrative potentials of BIMSTEC by evaluating the structural and perceptual conditions of the integration scheme. This is a case study on BIMSTEC consisting of qualitative and quantitative data extracted from secondary (literature review and the BIMSTEC website) and primary (expert interviews) sources. According to the paper, the structural and perceptual conditions of BIMSTEC are favourable for the functioning of the process mechanisms. The research contributes by proposing a new type of structural condition (level of supranational governance structure) essential for integration strategies to work in collaborative schemes like BIMSTEC. The paper concludes by recommending the establishment of an elite supra-nationalist network to enhance the level of supranational governance and strengthen the role of BIMSTEC in the Asian integration process, a route to the Asian Union in the future.

Keywords: BIMSTEC, Asian Union, Bay of Bengal, Indo-Pacific, Supranationalism, Elitism, Intergovernmentalism, Neo-functionalism, Border haats.

Introduction

The year 2022 marks the 25th anniversary of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), which started in 1997. BIMSTEC, like most regional integration, formation, or initiatives, began as an intergovernmental

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