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PM Modi's Sri Lanka, BIMSTEC visits highlight India's regional commitments

1. Purpose of the Visits

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's international visits in April include attending the BIMSTEC summit in Thailand and strengthening bilateral ties with Sri Lanka.
- These visits emphasize India's proactive foreign policy under the frameworks of Act East, MAHASAGAR, and Neighbourhood First.

2. India's Foreign Policy Vision

- *Act East Policy*: Focuses on strengthening ties with Southeast Asian countries for trade, cultural, and strategic cooperation.
- *Neighbourhood First Policy*: Gives priority to India's immediate neighbors in diplomatic and development partnerships.
- *MAHASAGAR Initiative*: Enhances maritime cooperation with Indian Ocean littoral nations through regular virtual interactions.

3. MAHASAGAR Initiative – Explained

- Full form: *Maritime Heads for Active Security And Growth for All in the Region*.
- Initiated by the Indian Navy in 2023 to foster virtual engagements among naval leaderships.
- Participating countries include Bangladesh, Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania.
- Held twice a year to enhance regional maritime security and coordination.

4. Visit to Thailand and BIMSTEC Summit

- PM Modi arrived in Thailand on April 3 and held bilateral talks with Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra.
- Discussions focused on deepening historical, cultural, and spiritual ties, aligning India's *Act East* with Thailand's *Look West* policy.



5. Objectives of BIMSTEC Summit Participation

- The sixth BIMSTEC summit aims to boost economic growth and connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region.
- BIMSTEC is crucial for integrating India's Northeast with Southeast Asia through better regional linkages.
- Vision 2030 document will be adopted, envisioning a *Prosperous, Resilient, and Open (PRO) BIMSTEC* by 2030.

6. Key BIMSTEC Outcomes Expected

- Review of the *Eminent Persons Group (EPG)* report suggesting structural reforms in the BIMSTEC mechanism.
- A *Maritime Transport Cooperation Agreement* may be signed, improving trade and sea connectivity among member states.
- India proposes to host three new BIMSTEC centres focused on agriculture, disaster management, and maritime transport.
- India already hosts two existing centres: the BIMSTEC Energy Centre (Bengaluru) and Climate Centre (Noida).

7. Economic and Trade Focus in BIMSTEC

- BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is still pending; India may advocate for faster progress in negotiations.
- Enhanced regional trade through FTA could unlock vast economic potential for member nations.
- India remains the largest contributor to BIMSTEC's budget, reinforcing its leadership role.

8. PM Modi's Visit to Sri Lanka: Strategic Timing

- First visit to Sri Lanka since President Anura Kumara Disanayake (AKD) took office.
- Builds on the momentum of AKD's earlier visit to India in December 2024.
- Sri Lanka is strategically significant in India's Indian Ocean maritime strategy.



9. Key Projects and Announcements

- Signing of the *Sampur Solar Power Project* in Trincomalee — a 120 MW joint venture between NTPC (India) and CEB (Sri Lanka).
- Discussions on regional *electricity grid connectivity* and a *multi-product petroleum pipeline* to enhance energy trade.
- Ongoing Indian infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka, including major initiatives in Anuradhapura.

10. India's Role in Sri Lanka's Development

- India is the most active development partner for Sri Lanka, especially post-economic crisis recovery.
- Infrastructure investments aim to improve connectivity, tourism, and local economies.

11. Maritime and Security Cooperation

- Continued discussions on the *Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm* joint venture — upgrading oil storage and improving energy security.
- India aims to turn Sri Lanka into a regional energy and trade hub in the Indian Ocean.
- Security assurances from President AKD that Sri Lanka will not permit any anti-India activities on its soil.

12. Addressing the Tamil Nadu Fishermen Issue

- The issue of Indian fishermen crossing into Sri Lankan waters remains a sensitive matter.
- India seeks humane treatment of its fishermen and promotes *deep-sea fishing* as a long-term resolution strategy.

13. Defense and Strategic Alignment

- Ensuring alignment in defense policies is crucial for maintaining regional peace and stability.
- Strengthening maritime security, counter-terrorism collaboration, and information-sharing mechanisms remains a shared priority.

14. Broader Strategic Significance

- PM Modi's visits reflect India's commitment to being a responsible regional leader in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific.



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- These engagements strengthen India's geopolitical influence while fostering mutually beneficial development partnerships.

15. Conclusion

- The Thailand and Sri Lanka visits represent a balanced mix of economic, strategic, and diplomatic objectives.
- While the BIMSTEC summit focuses on multilateral regional growth, the Sri Lanka visit deepens bilateral energy and security ties.
- Together, these efforts underscore India's vision of a secure, prosperous, and integrated regional future.

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