



## BIMSTEC – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**News:** The 2nd Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Foreign Ministers' Retreat will begin today in New Delhi.

- The event will provide an opportunity for the grouping's members to broaden and deepen cooperation across sectors including in the fields of security, connectivity, trade and investment in the Bay of Bengal region and littoral areas.

### What's in the news?

#### About BIMSTEC



- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is an international organisation of seven nations of South Asia and Southeast Asia:
  - Bangladesh
  - Bhutan
  - India
  - Nepal
  - Sri Lanka
  - Myanmar (South-east Asia)
  - Thailand (South-east Asia)
- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are the member states dependent on the Bay of Bengal.
- Its members lie in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity. BIMSTEC not only connects South and Southeast Asia, but also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal.



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- Fourteen priority sectors of cooperation have been identified and several BIMSTEC centres have been established to focus on those sectors.
- The permanent secretariat of the BIMSTEC is in Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- **The BIMSTEC uses the alphabetical order for the Chairmanship which has been taken in rotation commencing with Bangladesh (1997–1999).**

## History of Formation of the BIMSTEC

- In 1997, a new sub-regional grouping was formed in Bangkok under the name BIST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand Economic Cooperation).
- Following the inclusion of Myanmar on 22 December 1997 during a special Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok, the Group was renamed 'BIMST-EC' (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation).

In 2004, at the first Summit the grouping was renamed as BIMSTEC or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.

## Significance of BIMSTEC

- BIMSTEC acts as a platform for intra-regional cooperation between SAARC and ASEAN members.
- Around one-fourth of the world's traded goods cross the Bay of Bengal every year.
- Important Connectivity Projects related to BIMSTEC
- **Kaladan Multimodal Project** – links India and Myanmar.
- **Asian Trilateral Highway** – connecting India and Thailand through Myanmar.
- **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement** – for seamless flow of passenger and cargo traffic.

## Strategic Significance for India

- BIMSTEC Enables India to pursue three core policies:
  - **Neighbourhood First**- primacy to the country's immediate periphery;
  - **Act East**- connect India with Southeast Asia; and
  - **Economic development of India's North Eastern states**- by linking them to the Bay of Bengal region via Bangladesh and Myanmar.



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- India has moved from Look East Policy to Act East Policy and Indo Pacific cooperation through its diaspora, culture and connectivity. This has led to India's goodwill in the region.
- Allows India to counter China's creeping influence in countries around the Bay of Bengal due to the spread of its Belt and Road Initiative.
- Physical connectivity with BIMSTEC would also help India integrate itself with ASEAN's Master Plan of Connectivity 2025.
- A new platform for India to engage with its neighbours with South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) becoming dysfunctional because of differences between India and Pakistan.
- BIMSTEC suddenly received special attention as New Delhi chose to treat it as a more practical instrument for regional cooperation over a faltering SAARC.

**Source:** <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-hosts-bimstec-foreign-ministers-amid-raging-myanmar-crisis/article68394034.ece>

