

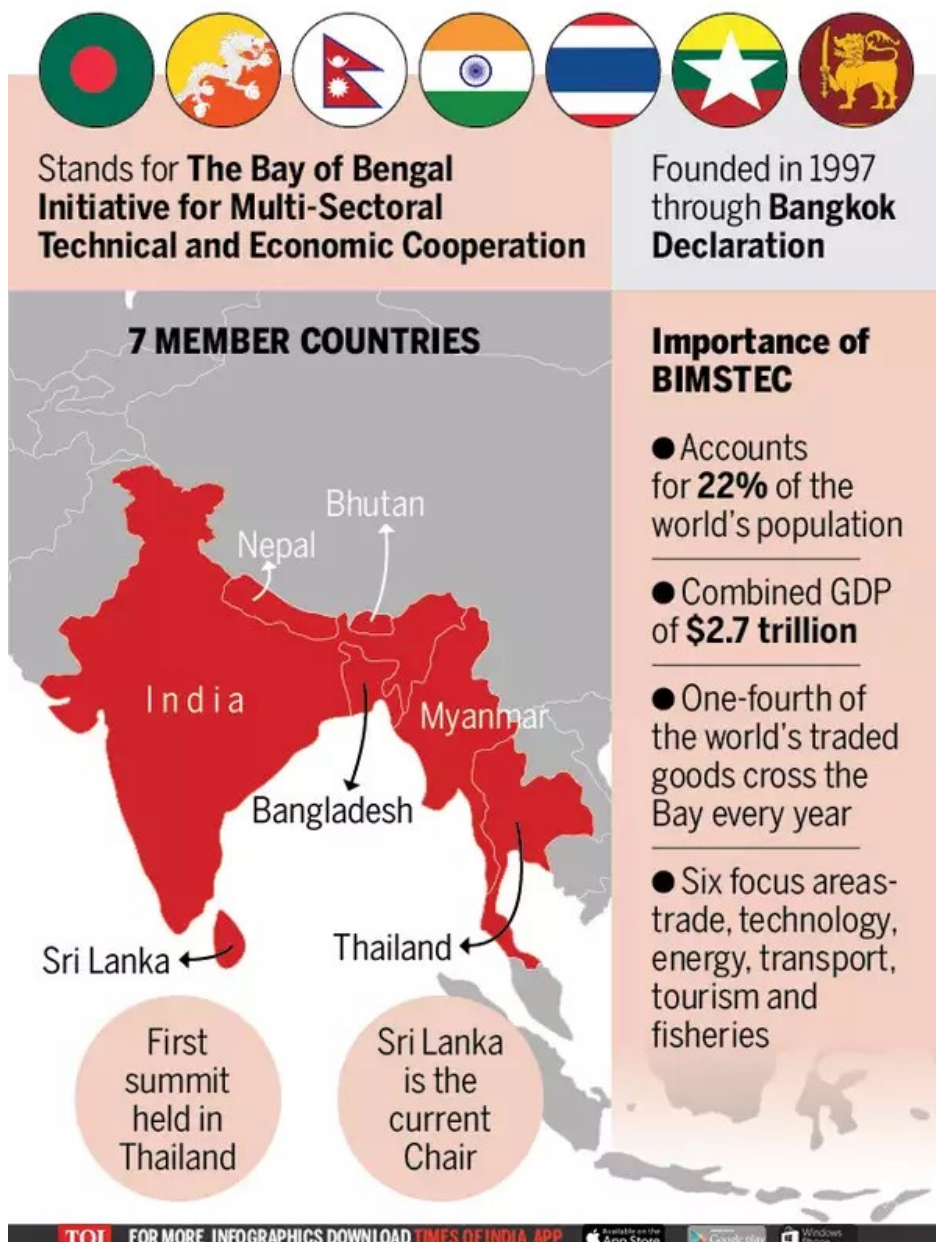
6TH BIMSTEC SUMMIT – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

NEWS: Prime Minister Narendra Modi **participated in the 6th BIMSTEC Summit** hosted by Thailand, the current chair, under the **theme— “BIMSTEC: Prosperous, Resilient and Open”**.

- The Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi proposed a **21-point Action Plan** covering different aspects of cooperation among the BIMSTEC nations
- During his visit, PM Modi was presented with The **World Tipitaka: Sajjhaya**

BIMSTEC

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW



Phonetic Edition by Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra.

India-Led Initiatives Announced

- **Business:** Establishment of **BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce**.
 - Organization of **BIMSTEC Business Summit** every year.
 - Feasibility study on the possibilities of **trade in local currency** in the BIMSTEC region.
- **IT:** Pilot study to understand the needs of BIMSTEC countries to share the experience of **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**
 - Connectivity between **UPI and payment systems** in the BIMSTEC region.
- **Mitigation and Disaster Management:** Establishing the **BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence for Disaster Management in India** to cooperate in disaster management, relief and rehabilitation.
 - **Fourth joint exercises** between BIMSTEC Disaster Management Authorities to be held in **India** this year.
- **Security:** Holding the **first meeting of the Home Ministers' Mechanism** in India
- **Capacity Building and Training:** "**BODHI**", i.e., "**BIMSTEC for Organised Development of Human resource Infrastructure**" initiative. Under this, 300 youth from BIMSTEC countries will be trained in India every year.
 - Scholarships to BIMSTEC students in the **Forestry Research Institute of India** and expansion of the scholarship scheme at **Nalanda University**.
- **Energy:** **BIMSTEC Energy Centre in Bengaluru** has started working.
 - Faster work on **electric grid interconnection**.
- **Youth engagement:** **BIMSTEC Young Leaders' Summit** to be held this year.

- The BIMSTEC **Hackathon and Young Professional Visitors programme** will be launched.
- **Sports:** Holding ‘**BIMSTEC Athletics Meet**’ in India this year.
 - Hosting the **first BIMSTEC Games in 2027**
- **Culture:** BIMSTEC **Traditional Music Festival** to be held in India this year
- **Connectivity:** Establishment of **Sustainable Maritime Transport Centre** in India to work to enhance coordination in capacity building, research, innovation and maritime policies.

About Tipitaka

- The Tripitaka, meaning “**Three Baskets**” in Sanskrit, is the foundational collection of **Buddhist scriptures**, traditionally divided into **three parts**:
 - **Vinaya Pitaka:** Contains the **rules and regulations for monastic life**, outlining the conduct and discipline expected of monks and nuns.
 - **Sutta Pitaka:** Comprises the **discourses and teachings of the Buddha**, including sermons and narratives.
 - **Abhidhamma Pitaka:** Delves into **philosophical and psychological analyses of Buddhist doctrines**.
- **Significance:** The Tripitaka is considered a foundational source for Buddhist practice and scholarship, serving to preserve and disseminate the Buddha’s teachings.
- **Pali Canon:** Also known as the Pali Canon, particularly in **Theravada Buddhism**.

Key Agreements & Documents Adopted

- **Summit Declaration:** Captures the shared vision, priorities, and commitments of member states.

- Sets the tone for future cooperation under the theme: “**Prosperous, Resilient, and Open BIMSTEC**”.
- **BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030:** A comprehensive roadmap for the next 5 years.
 - **Aligned with:**
 - **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**
 - **Thailand’s Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economic Model**
 - **Focused on:**
 - **Prosperity:** Trade, poverty alleviation, sustainable development.
 - **Resilience:** Agriculture, public health, disaster preparedness.
 - **Openness:** Tourism, connectivity, inclusiveness.
- **BIMSTEC Maritime Transport Cooperation Agreement**
 - Aims to enhance:
 - **Cargo and passenger movement** across Bay of Bengal.
 - **Recognition of documents and certificates** of vessels, crew, and cargo.
 - Establishment of a **Joint Shipping Coordination Committee**.
 - Provides a structured **dispute resolution mechanism**.
- **Rules of Procedure for BIMSTEC Mechanisms:** Complements the **BIMSTEC Charter (2022)**.
 - Enhances institutional clarity, decision-making, and functional coherence of BIMSTEC working bodies.
- **MoUs with International Organizations:**

- **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA):** Expands BIMSTEC's external cooperation on maritime and blue economy sectors.
- **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC):** Strengthens collaboration in Counter-narcotics, Criminal justice reform, and Transnational crime prevention.
- **Approval of Eminent Persons Group (EPG) report:** Offers strategic recommendations for: Institutional reform, Sectoral prioritization, Long-term visioning for BIMSTEC.
 - Finalized after regional consultations in **2024**.

BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)

About BIMSTEC

- BIMSTEC is a multilateral regional organization established with the aim of accelerating shared **growth and cooperation between littoral and adjacent countries in the Bay of Bengal region**.
- It was founded as **BIST-EC, in June 1997**, with the adoption of the **Bangkok Declaration**, with **Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand** as members.
 - It became **BIMST-EC** (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation) with the entry of **Myanmar in late 1997**,
 - And eventually, it was named in its current form, when **Nepal and Bhutan** became members in **2004**.
- Represents around **1.7 billion people (22% of the global population)** and a combined GDP of approximately **USD 4.5 trillion**.
- **Permanent Secretariat:** Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- **Membership:** It has a total of **seven member** countries:

- **Five from South Asia**, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka;
- **Two from Southeast Asia**, including Myanmar and Thailand.
- **Chairmanship:** The BIMSTEC uses the alphabetical order for the Chairmanship.
 - Currently, **Thailand**; it will be taken over by **Bangladesh**.

Significance of BIMSTEC for India

- **Strategic Importance:** BIMSTEC nations form a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia, central to India's **Act East Policy**.
 - **India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway** is a flagship connectivity initiative under BIMSTEC aimed at linking India's Northeast with ASEAN nations.
- **Alternative to SAARC:** BIMSTEC **excludes Pakistan**, enabling smoother cooperation without bilateral tensions.
 - **SAARC has not held a summit since 2014**, while BIMSTEC has held **four summits since 2016** and adopted a **Charter in 2022**, giving it legal personality.
- **Enhanced Connectivity & Northeast Integration:** Projects like the **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project** and the **BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement** aim to connect India's northeast with BIMSTEC nations.
 - BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity has been adopted and a **Maritime Transport Agreement** signed in 2025 to boost regional integration.
- **Energy & Blue Economy Cooperation:** India hosts the **BIMSTEC Energy Centre** in **Bengaluru**, and work has begun on **electric grid interconnection** to facilitate cross-border power trade.

- India and Myanmar lead renewable energy cooperation; India is also involved in sustainable maritime transport and blue economy initiatives.
- **Security & Disaster Management:** India leads BIMSTEC in **Counter-Terrorism, Cybersecurity, and Disaster Management** sectors.
 - Hosted **4th joint Disaster Management Exercise** and proposed a **Centre of Excellence for Disaster Management** in 2025.
- **Trade & Economic Integration:** Aims to boost intra-regional trade through the long-pending BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and economic corridors..
 - India proposed the annual **BIMSTEC Business Summit, a Chamber of Commerce**, and feasibility studies for **local currency trade** in 2025.
- **Cultural Diplomacy & Youth Engagement:** India is investing in **soft power** tools through **BIMSTEC Young Leaders' Summit, BIMSTEC Hackathon, Athletics Meet (2025), BIMSTEC Games (2027), Traditional Music Festival**.
 - Also announced, 300 youth trained annually under the “**BODHI**” programme and scholarships at Nalanda University.

How BIMSTEC is Different from SAARC

- **Geopolitical Scope & Strategic Value:** BIMSTEC bridges **South and Southeast Asia**, aligning with India's **Act East Policy**.
 - SAARC is confined to **South Asia** and remains inactive due to **India–Pakistan tensions**.
- **Membership Composition:** BIMSTEC has **7 members, excluding Pakistan**, which removes political deadlock.
 - SAARC includes **Pakistan**, often blocking consensus and cooperation.
- **Functional vs Political Orientation:** BIMSTEC focuses on **functional cooperation** in 7 sectors like connectivity, trade, disaster management.

- SAARC is often held hostage to **political rivalry**, especially between India and Pakistan.
- **Performance & Summits: BIMSTEC held 4 summits since 2016**, with the latest in 2025.
 - **SAARC has not met since 2014**, effectively paralyzed.
 - Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar termed SAARC a “**jammed vehicle**” after the 2016 Uri attack stalled its momentum.
- **Sectoral Leadership & Reforms: BIMSTEC has restructured sectors** with each member leading one (e.g., India leads Security, Thailand – Connectivity).
 - SAARC lacks such structured **sectoral responsibility** or reforms.
- **India’s Role & Acceptance: India’s leadership is welcomed in BIMSTEC.**
 - In SAARC, **India’s dominance is often resisted**, especially by Pakistan.
- **Emerging as Preferred Platform: With its focus on connectivity, trade, security, and exclusion of disruptive politics.**
 - **BIMSTEC is emerging as the more effective alternative** to SAARC.

Challenges in BIMSTEC

- **Slow Implementation of Agreements & Projects: Despite the FTA being signed in 2004**, it remains **unimplemented**, showing a significant gap between vision and action.
 - Several **connectivity projects**, including the **Trilateral Highway and Kaladan Project**, have seen **repeated delays** due to funding, land acquisition, and political issues.

- **Weak Institutional Capacity:** The **BIMSTEC Secretariat** in Dhaka is **understaffed and underfunded**, limiting coordination and policy implementation.
 - Lack of a **permanent funding mechanism** hinders large-scale regional initiatives and infrastructure development.
- **Over-Reliance on Political Consensus:** BIMSTEC functions on a **consensus-based model**, which, while inclusive, often results in **policy paralysis**—especially on contentious issues like security or border disputes.
- **Inter-Member Political Differences:** **Myanmar’s political instability** and **civil conflict** post-2021 coup have raised questions about member alignment and human rights concerns.
 - Bilateral tensions (e.g., between Myanmar–Bangladesh, or India–Nepal border issues) occasionally affect multilateral cohesion.
- **Low Intra-Regional Trade:** Intra-BIMSTEC trade remains **below 10%**, despite ambitious integration goals and repeated pushes for the **FTA** and **trade facilitation agreements**.
- **Limited Visibility and Public Awareness:** BIMSTEC lacks the public diplomacy and **brand visibility** of other regional groups like ASEAN.
 - People-to-people links remain weak despite India’s efforts (e.g., festivals, scholarships), and **private sector involvement is still minimal**.
- **Competing Regional Platforms:** Nations like **Thailand and Myanmar** are also part of **ASEAN**, and **Bangladesh** has growing ties with **China** via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
 - BIMSTEC risks being overshadowed by better-funded and more active platforms.

Major Initiatives by BIMSTEC

- **Institutional Framework & Charter:** **BIMSTEC Charter** adopted at the **5th Summit (Colombo, 2022)**, grants **legal personality and formal structure**.

- Adoption of **Rules of Procedure at 6th Summit (Bangkok, 2025)** to streamline the functioning of bodies and meetings.
- **Sectoral Reorganisation:** Earlier 14 sectors reduced to **7 priority sectors** for more focused cooperation in 2022.
- **BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity:** Adopted in 2022 to enhance **multi-modal regional transport networks**.
 - Involved in:
 - **Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Project**
 - **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway**
- **Maritime and Port Connectivity Initiatives**
 - **BIMSTEC Maritime Transport Cooperation Agreement (2025):** Signed at the **6th Summit (Bangkok)**.
 - Provisions include: **National treatment to vessels, Joint Shipping Coordination Committee, Mutual recognition of seafarer certificates, Dispute resolution framework.**
 - **BIMSTEC Conclave of Ports (2019, India):** Organized to promote **Port-to-port linkages, Maritime logistics cooperation and Blue Economy initiatives**
 - **BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement (Drafted):** Seeks to **reduce logistics cost and time**.
 - Aims to ease **short-sea shipping** between littoral states in the Bay of Bengal
- **BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement (BFTAFA):** Signed in **2004**, though not yet implemented.
 - Forms the legal foundation for **Trade in goods and services, Investment cooperation and Trade facilitation and standards harmonization.**

- **Security and Counter-Terrorism Cooperation**
 - BIMSTEC Working Groups on **Counter-terrorism & transnational crimes, Maritime security, and Cyber security.**
 - **MILEX-18:** First joint **military field exercise** among BIMSTEC nations (hosted by India in 2018).
 - Regular meetings of **National Security Chiefs** to coordinate responses to regional threats.
- **Energy Grid Integration:** MoU for establishing the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection was signed in 2018, during the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit in Kathmandu, Nepal,
 - Aiming to facilitate electricity trade and promote regional energy cooperation.
 - BIMSTEC Energy Centre located in **Bengaluru, India** but functions for all members
- **Disaster Management Framework:** Institutionalized after the 2004 tsunami and repeated cyclones.
 - Includes:
 - **BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercises (DMEx)**
 - Creation of **standard operating procedures**
 - Joint **early warning and risk reduction efforts**

Way Forward for BIMSTEC

- **Accelerate Implementation of Agreements:** Expedite long-pending initiatives like the **BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement (BFTAFA)** and the **Coastal Shipping Agreement.**
 - Adopt **binding timelines** and performance monitoring to move from intent to execution.

- **Strengthen Institutional Capacity: Augment the BIMSTEC Secretariat** in Dhaka with more staff, expertise, and budgetary autonomy.
 - Establish **permanent working groups** for key sectors and consider setting up a **dedicated BIMSTEC Development Fund**.
- **Enhance Connectivity on Multiple Fronts:** Ensure timely implementation of the **Master Plan for Transport Connectivity**.
 - Integrate **digital infrastructure, cross-border power grids, and data exchange platforms** to build a seamless economic zone.
- **Promote Inclusive & Participatory Regionalism:** Actively engage **civil society, private sector, think tanks, and academia** through Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues.
 - Institutionalize annual **Youth Conclaves, Business Forums, and Tech Summits**.
- **Focus on Sectoral Cooperation for Regional Resilience:** Expand collaboration in **public health, climate change, agriculture, and disaster risk reduction**.
 - Operationalize Centres of Excellence in areas like **disaster management, agriculture, and traditional medicine**.
- **Deepen Security Collaboration with Trust and Transparency:** Strengthen cooperation on **counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, and maritime security** through joint training, intelligence sharing, and capacity building.
- **Build a Shared Regional Identity:** Promote **people-to-people linkages** through culture, sports, and education.
 - Leverage initiatives like the **BIMSTEC Games (2027), Music Festivals, and BODHI programme** to foster a sense of community across the Bay of Bengal region.

Conclusion

The **6th BIMSTEC Summit** highlights India's proactive role in strengthening regional integration through **strategic initiatives, capacity-building programs**, and fostering robust **people-to-people connections**, aligning with **India's vision of shared prosperity, security, and sustainable growth** in the **Indo-Pacific region**.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-essentials/knowledge-nugget-bimstec-saarc-upsc-vietnam-6th-prelims-9922446/>