

## **Brief on BIMSTEC**

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a grouping of seven Member States lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal. It is a unique link connecting South Asia with South-East Asia - five Members from South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) and two from South-East Asia (Myanmar and Thailand). The BIMSTEC region brings together 1.7 billion people - 22% of world population with a combined GDP of US\$ 5 trillion.

2. The organization came into existence on 6 June 1997 through the 'Bangkok Declaration'. It was originally formed with four Member States with the acronym 'BIST-EC' (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation). Following inclusion of Myanmar in December 1997, it was renamed 'BIMST-EC' (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation). With the inclusion of Nepal and Bhutan in 2004, the name of the grouping was changed to BIMSTEC.

3. BIMSTEC organizes inter-governmental interactions through Summits, Ministerial Meetings, Senior Officials Meetings, Permanent Working Committee, Joint Working Groups and Experts level Meetings. Five BIMSTEC Summits have been held so far - 2004 (Bangkok), 2008 (New Delhi), 2014 (Nay Pyi Taw), 2018 (Kathmandu) and 2022 (Colombo). The sixth Summit is scheduled to be held in Thailand in 2025. India hosted BIMSTEC Outreach Summit and Leaders Retreat in Goa in October 2016.

4. There have been 19 BIMSTEC Foreign Ministerial meetings, with the last meeting held on 09 March 2023 in Bangkok in virtual mode. There have been two BIMSTEC Foreign Minister's Retreats, the last one took place in July 2024 in New Delhi. There was an Informal Meeting of BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers on the sidelines of 79th Session of UNGA on 27 September 2024, New York. There have been 24 Senior Officials Meetings, with the last one held on 19 December 2024 in Bangkok in virtual mode. Eight regular meetings of the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee have been held so far - the latest one was held on 25 February 2025 in Bangkok in virtual mode. Thailand is the current Chair of BIMSTEC. A Permanent Secretariat of the organization was setup in Dhaka in 2014. Ambassador Indra Mani Pandey is the current and 4th BIMSTEC Secretary General, since 04 January 2024.

5. BIMSTEC National Security chiefs discuss security cooperation. Four rounds of these meetings have taken place till now, the last meeting took place in Nay Pyi Taw in July 2024.

6. The 5<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit was held on 30 March 2022 in Colombo, Sri Lanka with the Leaders participating virtually. At the Summit, the Leaders adopted the BIMSTEC Charter, a

milestone in the transition of BIMSTEC from a grouping into a regional organization. The Charter entered into force on 20 May 2024. They also issued a Joint Declaration and witnessed the signing of three documents namely, BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters; MoU on Mutual Cooperation between Diplomatic Academies/Training Institutions of BIMSTEC Member States; and Memorandum of Association on the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Colombo. At the Summit, the Leaders also endorsed the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity.

7. At the 5<sup>th</sup> Summit, the Leaders endorsed reorganization of priority areas/pillars of cooperation into seven priority areas / pillars, with each priority areas led by one Member country. India is the Lead Country for Security pillar under which there are three sub-sectors - Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC), Disaster Management and Energy Security. The remaining priority areas / pillars and their Lead Countries are – Trade, Investment and Development (Bangladesh); Environment and Climate Change (Bhutan); People-to-People Contacts (Nepal); Agriculture and Food Security (Myanmar); Science, Technology and Innovation (Sri Lanka) and Connectivity (Thailand).

8. India hosts the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate (BCWC) at Noida to provide weather data for the region, as per a Memorandum of Association signed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Summit in March 2014. A BIMSTEC Energy Centre has been established in Bengaluru, India for enhanced cooperation in energy security within BIMSTEC region.

9. At the 5<sup>th</sup> Summit, in line with India's commitment towards strengthening BIMSTEC, Prime Minister announced the following initiatives:

(i) A one time grant of USD 1 million to the operational budget of the Secretariat to complete institution building tasks - *implemented*,

(ii) A capacity building program by ICRIER in collaboration with ADB on Trade Facilitation – *first such program was held from 08-19 May 2023 and the second program will be held from 18-29 March 2025.*

(iii) Expansion of the scope of the existing BIMSTEC Nalanda Scholarship Scheme – *coverage of students under the scheme has since been enhanced*,

(iv) Establishment of networking scheme among institutes of Marine Sciences in the BIMSTEC region –BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network (BIMReN) was launched in February 2024.

(v) Commissioned a Study by RIS on creating regional value chains and value added agricultural products in the BIMSTEC region – *under implementation.*

10. Recent initiatives by India:

- i. India hosted the BIMSTEC Aquatics Championship in New Delhi in February 2024 with 400-plus athletes from all BIMSTEC countries participating in Swimming, Water-polo, and Diving events.
- ii. India organized the BIMSTEC Youth Summit in Ahmedabad in February 2025 with more than 70 youth delegates from BIMSTEC countries to foster regional cooperation. The summit focused on challenges and opportunities in entrepreneurship, digital connectivity, cyberspace, and sustainable development.
- iii. A special 'BIMSTEC' Pavilion was established at the 38th Surajkund International Crafts Fair in February 2025, hosting 33 craft artists and 68 cultural performers from BIMSTEC member states.
- iv. The BIMSTEC Youth Led Conference on Climate Change was hosted by MEA and Bharat Scouts and Guides from 20-24 February 2025 in New Delhi. More than 150 participants from 7 BIMSTEC countries participated in the event, which included sessions on SDGs, climate change mitigation, and cultural performances.

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March 2025