



India Hosts BIMSTEC Young Professionals Exchange Programme in Maharashtra | Maharashtra | 19 Mar 2026

Why in News?

India hosted the **BIMSTEC Young Professionals Exchange Programme** in **Maharashtra** in **March 2026** to promote regional cooperation, knowledge exchange, and exposure to India's innovation ecosystem.

Key Points:

- **Organising Authority:** The programme was organised by the **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)** in partnership with the **Government of Maharashtra**.
 - The programme was conducted in **Mumbai and Pune** in Maharashtra.
 - Around **30 young professionals**, including innovators, entrepreneurs, and technology experts from BIMSTEC countries, participated.
- **Objective:** To promote **knowledge exchange, regional cooperation, and collaboration** among emerging leaders of the **Bay of Bengal region**.
 - Exposure to India's **innovation, start-up, research, and technology ecosystems**.
- **Outcome:** The initiative enabled participants to understand **India's development model** and explore opportunities for partnerships and collaboration.
- **First Edition:** It was the **first BIMSTEC Young Professionals Exchange Programme**, institutionalising **youth-led regional cooperation**.
- **BIMSTEC:** BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) connects **South and Southeast Asia**, comprising **7 member countries**.
- **Significance:** Strengthens **people-to-people ties, innovation networks, and regional integration** among BIMSTEC nations.

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Maharashtra Passes Freedom of Religion Bill 2026 | Maharashtra | 19 Mar 2026

Why in News?

The **Maharashtra Legislature** has passed the **Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Bill 2026**, aimed at regulating religious conversions and preventing conversions through coercion, fraud, or inducement.

Key Points:

- **Key Provisions of the Bill:** Bans conversions made through force, fraud, allurement, coercion, or marriage-related deception.

- Penalties:
 - **General offences:** 3 to 5 years jail and fine up to ₹1 lakh.
 - **Vulnerable groups (Minors, Women, SC/ST):** Up to 7 years jail and ₹5 lakh fine.
 - **Mass conversions:** Up to 10 years jail and ₹5 lakh fine.
- **Procedural Mandates:** Requires a **60-day prior notice** to the District Magistrate and post-conversion reporting within 21 days.
- **Burden of Proof:** Placed on the accused to prove the conversion was not forced or fraudulent.
- **Fundamental Rights: Article 25 of the Indian Constitution** guarantees **freedom of religion**, including the right to propagate religion.
 - However, the Supreme Court has upheld that **forced or fraudulent conversions are not protected.**
- **Judicial Position:** In **Rev. Stanislaus vs State of Madhya Pradesh (1977)**, the Supreme Court ruled:
 - The right to “propagate” does **not include the right to convert others by force or inducement.**
- **Significance:** Seeks to **prevent exploitation and coercion** in religious conversion.

Read More: [Article 25](#)

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