



2nd BIMSTEC Agriculture Ministers Meeting

For Prelims: BIMSTEC, IFPRI

For Mains: Neighbourhood first policy, Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests

Why in News?

Recently, India hosted the **Second Agriculture Ministerial-level meeting** of the [Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation \(BIMSTEC\)](#).

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

- India urged the **member countries to cooperate in developing a comprehensive regional strategy** to strengthen cooperation for the transformation of agriculture.
- It also **urged the member countries to adopt a conducive agricultural food system and a healthy diet for all** by referring to the **importance of millet as a nutritious food and the efforts made by India to promote millet** and its products during the [International Year of Millets - 2023](#).
- [Natural and ecological farming](#) should be promoted to conserve agricultural biodiversity and reduce the use of chemicals.
 - **Along with digital farming and precision farming**, initiatives under the ['One Health' approach](#) are also taking shape in India.
- **Highlighted India's statement at the 5th BIMSTEC Summit held in Colombo in March, 2022** on enhancing regional cooperation between BIMSTEC nations for food security, peace and prosperity in the region.
- Adopted the **Action Plan for Strengthening BIMSTEC Agricultural Cooperation (2023-2027)**.
- An MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) between the BIMSTEC Secretariat and the [International Food Policy Research Institute \(IFPRI\)](#) has been signed and approval has been given to bring fisheries and livestock sub-sectors under the Agricultural Working Group.

What is BIMSTEC?

- **About:**
 - The BIMSTEC is a **regional organisation comprising seven Member States:** five deriving from South Asia, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and two from Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand.
 - This sub-regional organisation came into being on **6th June 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration**.
 - The BIMSTEC region is **home to around 1.5 billion people which constitute around 22% of the global population** with a combined **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** of 2.7 trillion economy.
 - The BIMSTEC Secretariat is in **Dhaka**.

- **Institutional Mechanisms:**
 - BIMSTEC Summit
 - **Ministerial Meeting**
 - Senior Officials' Meeting
 - BIMSTEC Working Group
 - Business Forum & Economic Forum
- **Significance:**
 - The BIMSTEC has **huge potential as a natural platform for development cooperation** in a rapidly changing geopolitical calculus and can leverage its unique position as a pivot in the **Indo-Pacific region**.
 - The **growing value of BIMSTEC can be attributed to its geographical contiguity**, abundant natural and human resources, and rich historical linkages and a cultural heritage for promoting deeper cooperation in the region.
 - The **Bay of Bengal region has the potential to become the epicentre of the Indo-Pacific idea**, a place where the strategic interests of the major powers of East and South Asia intersect.
 - It **serves as a bridge between two major high-growth centres of Asia** — South and Southeast Asia.

What are the Challenges with BIMSTEC?

- **Inconsistency in Meetings: BIMSTEC planned to hold summits every two years**, ministerial meetings every year, but only five summits have taken place in 20 years.
- **Neglected by member states:** It seems that India has used BIMSTEC only when it fails to work through SAARC in the regional setting and other major members like Thailand and Myanmar are focused more towards ASEAN than BIMSTEC.
- **Broad Focus Areas:** The focus of BIMSTEC is very wide, **including 14 areas of cooperation like connectivity, public health, agriculture etc.** It is suggested that BIMSTEC should remain committed to small focus areas and cooperate in them efficiently.
- **Bilateral Issues between Member Nations:** Bangladesh is facing one of the worst refugee crises of Rohingyas from Myanmar who are fleeing prosecution in the state of Rakhine in Myanmar. There is a border conflict between Myanmar and Thailand.
- **BCIM:** The formation of another sub-regional initiative, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Forum, with the proactive membership of China, has created more doubts about the exclusive potential of BIMSTEC.
- **Inadequate Focus on Economic Cooperation:** A quick look at the unfinished tasks and new challenges gives an idea of the burden of responsibilities on the grouping.
 - **Despite signing a framework agreement for a comprehensive [Free Trade Agreement \(FTA\)](#) in 2004**, BIMSTEC stands far away from this goal.

Way Forward

- There is a **need for finalisation of the BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement among the member countries**.
 - As the region is facing challenges of health and economic security and stressed the need for **solidarity and cooperation**, the FTA will make the Bay of Bengal a bridge of connectivity, a bridge of prosperity, a bridge of security.
- India would have to counter the impression that **BIMSTEC is an India-dominated bloc, in that context India can follow the [Gujral doctrine](#)** that intends to chalk out the effect of transactional motive in bilateral relations.
- BIMSTEC should focus more in the future on new areas such as the **[blue economy](#), the [digital economy](#)**, and promotion of exchanges and links among start-ups and **[Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises \(MSMEs\)](#)**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. Do you think that BIMSTEC is a parallel organisation like the SAARC? What are the similarities and dissimilarities between the two? How are Indian foreign policy objectives realized by forming this new

organisation? (2022)

Source: PIB

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