

## Relook at BIMSTEC's Functioning

### What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- The fourth BIMSTEC summit recently concluded in Kathmandu, Nepal. Click [here](#) to know more.

\n

- It made notable progress in reforming the structural and procedural framework of the grouping, but concerns remain.

\n

\n\n

### What are the administrative initiatives?

\n\n

\n

- BIMSTEC has so far functioned on the basis of

\n

\n\n

\n

i. the Bangkok Declaration of 1997

\n

ii. outcomes of the past three summits

\n

iii. the Leaders' Retreat in 2016

\n

\n\n

\n

- So the need for a firm institutional foundation for the BIMSTEC was a long felt one.

\n

- In this context, work has now begun on drafting a charter for BIMSTEC.

\n

- Also, a Permanent Working Committee will be set up.

\n

- This is to provide direction during the period between two summits.

- \n
- It will also prepare the Rules of Procedure for the BIMSTEC summits.
- \n
- Besides, the Secretariat has been promised additional financial and human resources.
- \n
- Efforts at enhancing its role to coordinate, monitor and facilitate the grouping's activities will also be taken up.
- \n
- Moreover, the institution has been handicapped due to lack of sound financial back up.
- \n
- The leaders thus took the decision to establish the BIMSTEC Development Fund.
- \n
- It was agreed to make a push to increase BIMSTEC's visibility and stature in the international fora.
- \n
- Currently, there are 16 areas of cooperation between the member states, making it too wide a spectrum.
- \n
- To address this, BIMSTEC governments will make efforts to review, restructure and rationalise various sectors.
- \n
- They will embark on identifying a few core areas for effective cooperation.
- \n
- In this exercise, Thailand has proposed a new strategy of five pillars:
- \n

\n\n

- \n
1. connectivity
- \n
2. trade and investment
- \n
3. people-to-people contacts
- \n
4. security
- \n
5. science and technology
- \n

\n\n

- \n
- This will be considered, keeping in mind the individual member states'

preferences to certain specific sectors.

\n

\n\n

## **What are the concerns in the outcomes?**

\n\n

\n

- There are at least six legal instruments awaiting finalisation in the BIMSTEC.  
\n
- Of this, only one, the Memorandum of Understanding on Grid Interconnection, could be inked in Kathmandu.  
\n
- It has been fourteen years since signing the framework agreement on Free Trade Area (FTA).  
\n
- However, the leaders could only renew their “commitment to an early conclusion” of FTA negotiations.  
\n
- The Thai PM urged participants to accept making BIMSTEC a Free Trade Zone by 2021 as “our common goal”.  
\n
- But this did not find a place in the summit declaration.  
\n
- The grouping had established its Energy Centre in 2009, but it was still struggling for the “early operationalisation”.  
\n
- The Kathmandu Declaration has spelt out a number of measures to secure the objective of 'connectivity'.  
\n
- However, the Motor Vehicle and Coastal Shipping Agreements are delayed and needed more time for finalisation.  
\n
- There was a call for making the BIMSTEC summit an annual affair.  
\n
- But leaders chose a “timely holding of Summit”.  
\n
- The next summit's timing will only be determined by the degree of progress ministers and officials achieve in the course of time.  
\n

\n\n

## **What are the ongoing developments?**

\n\n

\n

- There are plans to revitalise the Business Forum and the Economic Forum.
- This is welcome, if they help in fully engaging business and industry.
- Cooperation in the security domain has been progressing satisfactorily.
- A new initiative is the arrangement for meeting of home ministers.
- This will be in addition to annual meetings of national security advisers.
- Besides, the first meeting of army chiefs is due to take place in Pune, India soon.
- There are also plans to establish forums for parliamentarians, universities, cultural organisations and the media community.
- With all these in place, BIMSTEC can become a dynamic, effective and result-oriented organisation.
- But the progress and efforts in the coming period will be crucial in its further development.

\n\n

\n\n

**Source: The Hindu**

\n

