



2nd Retreat of the Foreign Ministers of the BIMSTEC

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

The 2nd Retreat of the Foreign Ministers of the [Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation \(BIMSTEC\)](#) was held in New Delhi, taking on added significance amid escalating tensions and **major developments in Myanmar**.

- External Affairs Minister of India emphasised the need for BIMSTEC to address regional challenges internally, especially in light of recent setbacks faced by [Myanmar's military junta against various Ethnic Armed Organisations \(EAOs\)](#).

Note: This retreat is the first major event since the [BIMSTEC Charter](#) came into effect in 2024, marking a significant milestone in the organisation's evolution. The 1st edition of the BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Retreat was held in Bangkok, Thailand in 2023.

What are the Key Highlights of the BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Retreat?

- **Global and Regional Developments:** The meeting underscored the urgency of addressing long-standing goals like capacity **building and economic cooperation due to current global and regional challenges**.
- **Myanmar Crisis:** Discussions centred on the impact of the Myanmar crisis on regional stability and developmental projects. The instability in Myanmar is a major concern for BIMSTEC as it has affected various developmental and connectivity projects aimed at strengthening ties among **Nepal, Bhutan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Thailand**.
- **Humanitarian Assistance Discussions:** Conversations included the potential for humanitarian aid, though India's current assistance has been limited to displaced populations and military personnel who have taken refuge in Mizoram.
- **India Stance on Myanmar Crisis: India maintains a cautious stance, particularly since Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) have gained control over crucial trade routes and territories near international borders.**
 - India continues to cooperate on countering [transnational crimes](#) such as [cybercrime](#), [narcotics](#), and [illegal arms](#).

Myanmar Crisis

Myanmar's **military (the Tatmadaw) junta**, overthrew the democratically elected government in February 2021. This led to widespread protests and a civil disobedience movement demanding the restoration of democracy.

- In response to the junta's crackdown, opposition groups, including **Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs)**, formed the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) to resist military rule, aligning with the National Unity Government (NUG) established by ousted lawmakers. Since October 2023, fighting

between the military and armed opposition groups has intensified, causing widespread displacement and humanitarian crisis.

- **Almost 2.6 million people have fled their homes, and 18.6 million people, roughly 1/3 of the total population, need humanitarian assistance.** **Inflation** and conflict have driven up the price of food and other basic necessities, leading to hunger and potential illness for 1/4 of the population.
- India maintains a balanced stance, expressing concern over the disruption of democracy while engaging with the junta to safeguard its interests. Notably, anti-junta forces have captured strategic towns near the **India-Myanmar border**, impacting crucial connectivity projects like the **India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway**.

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BIMSTEC

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

Members: 7

Significance: Hosts 22% of the world population, accounts for 3.8 trillion of GDP

Formation: 6th June 1997 (Bangkok Declaration)

Secretariat: Dhaka, Bangladesh

NEPAL

- Shares border with 5 Indian states (Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim and Bihar)
- Bharat Gaurav Tourist Train connecting India's Ayodhya and Nepal's Janakpur
- Major Issues: Territorial Disputes (Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh)
- Military Exercise: Surya Kiran (Army)

BHUTAN

- India is Bhutan's largest trade partner
- Mutually Beneficial Hydropower Cooperation: Mangdechhu, Kholongchhu, Chukha hydropower Projects
- India's grant assistance to Gyalsung Project
- Integration of Bhutan's DrukRen with India's National Knowledge Network

MYANMAR

- Only Southeast Asian country that shares a land border with north-eastern India
- The 2021 coup returned Myanmar to military rule
- India's Development Assistance: India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMMTT), Sittwe port
- Major Issue: Rohingya Crisis

SRI LANKA

- India is Sri Lanka's third largest export destination
- India is the first country to officially back Sri Lanka's debt restructuring programme at IMF
- Major Issue: Fishermen crossing maritime boundary
- Important Exercises: Mitra Shakti (Army), SLINEX (Naval)

BANGLADESH

- Shares the longest border of over 4,096 km with India
- Largest trading partner in South Asia
- Water Sharing Agreements: Kushiyara river (2022), Ganga Water Treaty (1996)
- Major Issues: Teesta River Water Dispute
- Military Exercises: SAMPRITI-X (Military Training), Bongosagar (Naval)

THAILAND

- Thai language is written in script derived from Southern Indian Pallava alphabet
- Hinduism, Buddhism – both religions of Indian origin being popular in Thailand
- Convergence of India's 'Act East' policy with Thailand's 'Act West' policy
- Military Exercises: MAITREE (Army), SIAM BHARAT (Air Force), Indo-Thai CORPAT (Naval)

Drishti IAS

Read more: [BIMSTEC Charter](#)

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following pairs: (2016)

	Community sometimes mentioned in the news	In the affairs of
1.	Kurd	Bangladesh
2.	Madhesi	Nepal
3.	Rohingya	Myanmar

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

- (a) 1 and 2
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3
- (d) 3 only

Ans- (c)

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