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

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

Four countries founded it in 1997. It then took until 2024 to get a legal identity. BIMSTEC is a small club of Bay of Bengal nations that bridges South Asia and Southeast Asia. This page covers its members, its Charter and the Bangkok summit of 2025.

Keep three questions in mind. How did four countries build a Bay of Bengal club? Who belongs and what do they lead? And when did it get a legal identity?

> **1997.** Founded, Bangkok Declaration
> **2004.** Nepal and Bhutan join
> **2022.** Charter adopted
> **2024.** Charter in force
> **Apr 2025.** 6th Summit, Bangkok

BIST-EC: The original name, with four members.

Charter: The founding legal document, adopted in 2022.

Secretariat: The permanent office, in Dhaka.

BODHI: BIMSTEC for Organised Development of Human Resource Infrastructure.

1 How did four countries build a Bay of Bengal club?

Imagine four countries around the Bay of Bengal deciding to work together. In June 1997, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand did exactly that.

They signed the Bangkok Declaration. The group was called BIST-EC at first.

Myanmar joined later in 1997. The name became BIMST-EC. Nepal and Bhutan joined in 2004. The name became BIMSTEC, and the group had seven members.

> **Think it through:** Why is BIMSTEC called a bridge?
>
> Five members are in South Asia and two are in Southeast Asia. It links the two regions across the Bay of Bengal.

- Founded: **June 1997**, **Bangkok Declaration**.
- First name: **BIST-EC**, four members.
- Seven members since **2004**.
- Secretariat: **Dhaka**.

> **Quick check 1.** BIMSTEC was founded through the Dhaka Declaration. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

2 Who belongs, and what does each lead?

The seven members are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Pakistan is not a member.

Each member leads a sector. India leads security. Thailand leads connectivity. Bangladesh leads trade and investment. Bhutan leads environment and climate change.

Myanmar leads agriculture and food security. Nepal leads people-to-people contact. Sri Lanka leads science, technology and innovation.

Chairmanship rotates in alphabetical order among the seven members.

- India: **security**.
- Thailand: **connectivity**.
- Bangladesh: **trade and investment**.
- Nepal: **people-to-people contact**.

> **Quick check 2.** Thailand leads the connectivity sector. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

3 When did BIMSTEC get a legal identity?

For over 25 years, BIMSTEC had no formal legal personality. Members adopted the BIMSTEC Charter on 30 March 2022 at the Fifth Summit, hosted by Sri Lanka. The Charter entered into force on 20 May 2024. That is when BIMSTEC gained legal personality.

Technical centres are spread across members. The Energy Centre is in Bengaluru. The Weather and Climate Centre is in NOIDA. The Cultural Industries Observatory is in Thimphu, Bhutan. The Technology Transfer Facility is in Colombo.

- Charter: adopted **2022**, in force **20 May 2024**.
- Energy Centre: **Bengaluru**.
- Cultural Industries Observatory: **Bhutan**.
- Technology Transfer Facility: **Colombo**.

> **Quick check 3.** Every BIMSTEC technical centre is in India. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

4 What did the 6th Summit in Bangkok decide?

The 6th Summit was held in Bangkok on 4 April 2025. Its theme was “Prosperous, Resilient, and Open BIMSTEC”. (Source: BIMSTEC Secretariat)

Leaders adopted the Bangkok Vision 2030 and a maritime transport agreement. Bangladesh took over the chair for two years. (Source: Manorama Yearbook)

PM Modi proposed BODHI, a plan to train youth from BIMSTEC countries in India. India will host the first BIMSTEC Games in 2027, the group's 30th anniversary.

- Summit: **4 April 2025**, Bangkok.
- Adopted: **Bangkok Vision 2030**.
- Chair now: **Bangladesh**, two years.
- India hosts: **BIMSTEC Games, 2027**.

> **Quick check 4.** Bangladesh took over the BIMSTEC chair after the Bangkok summit. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

5 What is new: the first Home Ministers' Meeting?

[First] India hosted the first BIMSTEC Home Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi on **13 October 2026**. All seven member states took part. (Source: PIB.)

The meeting adopted the **Delhi Declaration**. It condemns terrorism in all forms, including cross-border terrorism, and backs UN Security Council sanctions. It also calls for joint action against trafficking of people into online scam centres.

The 6th Summit in Bangkok (4 April 2025) had welcomed this Home Ministers' mechanism. Before this, BIMSTEC security talks were held only at the level of National Security Advisers.

6 What are the exam traps?

- **Bangkok** Declaration, not Dhaka.
- First name **BIST-EC**; Nepal was **not** a founder.

- Members: **7**; **Pakistan** is not one.
- Legal personality: Charter in force **20 May 2024**. Adopted 2022.
- Not every technical centre is in India.

Practice MCQs

1. BIMSTEC was founded in June 1997, through which declaration?

A. The Dhaka Declaration

B. The Bangkok Declaration

C. The Colombo Declaration

D. The Kathmandu Declaration

See answer ↓

2. How many member countries does BIMSTEC currently have, and which two joined last, in 2004?

A. Seven members; Nepal and Bhutan joined last

B. Eight members; Bhutan and Myanmar joined last

C. Six members; Myanmar and Thailand joined last

D. Five members; Sri Lanka and Bangladesh joined last

See answer ↓

3. When did BIMSTEC gain international legal personality, and how?

A. In 2004, when Nepal and Bhutan joined and the group was renamed

B. In 1997, automatically, upon founding under the Bangkok Declaration

C. On 20 May 2024, when the BIMSTEC Charter entered into force.

D. BIMSTEC still has no formal legal personality as of 2026

See answer ↓

4. Where is the BIMSTEC Secretariat headquartered?

A. New Delhi, India

B. Dhaka, Bangladesh

C. Colombo, Sri Lanka

D. Kathmandu, Nepal

See answer ↓

5. What was BIMSTEC originally called at its 1997 founding, and what region does the grouping bridge?

A. BOBP; it bridges East Asia with the Pacific

B. BIST-EC; it bridges South Asia with Southeast Asia

C. IOR-ARC; it bridges Africa with South Asia

D. SAARC-Plus; it bridges South Asia with Central Asia

See answer ↓

6. Which one of the following statements about BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral, Technical and Economic Cooperation) is not correct?

A. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand are member-states of BIMSTEC.

B. Its secretariat is located in Dhaka.

C. India is the lead country of its security sector.

D. Thailand is the lead country of its connectivity sector.

See answer ↓

7. Which BIMSTEC member state hosts the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory?

A. Bangladesh

B. Sri Lanka

C. Bhutan

D. India

See answer ↓

8. BIMSTEC links South Asia and South East Asia through economic cooperation.

Which sea gives the grouping its name?

A. The Andaman Sea

B. The South China Sea

C. The Bay of Bengal

D. The Arabian Sea

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **B.** BIMSTEC was founded in June 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration, initially as BIST-EC with four members: Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. ↑ Q1
2. **A.** BIMSTEC has seven members. Nepal and Bhutan joined in 2004, taking the group from five to seven members and prompting its renaming to BIMSTEC. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** The BIMSTEC Charter was adopted on 30 March 2022 at the Fifth Summit in Colombo. It entered into force on 20 May 2024. That is when the group gained international legal personality. ↑ Q3
4. **B.** The BIMSTEC Secretariat is headquartered in Dhaka, Bangladesh. ↑ Q4
5. **B.** BIMSTEC was originally called BIST-EC, an acronym of its four founding members (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand). It bridges South Asia and Southeast Asia, linking five South Asian nations with two Southeast Asian ones. ↑ Q5
6. **A.** The correct answer is (a). This statement is wrong. BIMSTEC has only 7 members: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Pakistan is NOT a member — this distinguishes BIMSTEC from SAARC. The other three statements are correct: Dhaka hosts the secretariat, India leads security, Thailand leads connectivity. ↑ Q6
7. **C.** The BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory is hosted in Thimphu, Bhutan, established following an MoU at the 2014 BIMSTEC Summit.

   ↑ Q7
8. **C.** BIMSTEC brings together countries bordering or near the Bay of Bengal. ↑ Q8

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** ↑ 1
2. **True.** ↑ 2
3. **False.** ↑ 3
4. **True.** ↑ 4

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