

INDIA SEEKS CLOSER BIMSTEC PARTNERSHIP

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S. Jaishankar at the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation meeting in ColomboAP

The world is passing through one of the most difficult phases in recent history as the war in Ukraine has erupted even before the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar said on Tuesday in Colombo.

Addressing the ministerial of the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), he urged closer cooperation and connectivity among the members. The BIMSTEC summit scheduled for Wednesday has drawn global attention because of participation from Myanmar which was isolated internationally following the military takeover in February 2021.

Mr. Jaishankar said members should create supply and value chains to prevent “external shocks” because of the unpredictable situation in the world.

“Under these circumstances, as we shore up our domestic capacities, we also need to broaden and deepen cooperation under BIMSTEC. We need more working together in many more areas; we need more effective and fast-paced cooperation. We need to intensify and build on what we have achieved in the last 25 years,” Mr. Jaishankar said.

‘Landmark achievement’

The meeting was held a day before the leaders’ meeting when the BIMSTEC Charter will be adopted. BIMSTEC was initiated in 1997 but its overall coherence suffered in recent years because of the differences between Bangladesh and Myanmar over the Rohingya issue that erupted in 2017. Apart from the Charter, the leaders of the grouping are also expected to adopt the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity.

Mr. Jaishankar referred to the Charter as a “landmark achievement”.

“But we must not rest on the achievement and instead move on to next steps that can be taken to further strengthen BIMSTEC. I am confident that we will identify priority institution building tasks and areas of cooperation, and task our senior officials to work with the Secretary General for their realisation.” said Mr. Jaishankar.

BIMSTEC has India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand as its members and the Charter and the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity are expected to boost trade among the members.

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