

Bimstec chief: As chair, Bangladesh can reaffirm its global commitment

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (Bimstec) Secretary General Indra Mani Pandey has said Bangladesh, as the next chair of the regional organisation, will have an opportunity to “re-demonstrate to the world” its commitment to regional cooperation by leading the organisation with broader initiatives in diverse areas.

“As the chair, Bangladesh will have the opportunity to lead Bimstec, take initiatives for cooperation in different sectors by working together in tandem with all the member states and this will be an opportunity for Bangladesh to re-demonstrate its commitment to the world,” he said on Tuesday.

The Bimstec secretary general made the remarks during an interaction with the members of the Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh (DCAB) at its headquarters ahead of the sixth summit scheduled for April 4.

DCAB President AKM Moinuddin and General Secretary Md Arifuzzaman Mamun were also present.

Thailand will host the Sixth Summit of Bimstec in Bangkok and Bangladesh will take responsibility as its next chair.

Before the summit, there will be a ministerial meeting on April 3.

Noting Bangladesh’s very high degree of commitment, he said Bangladesh has always been a “very strong supporter” of regional cooperation and whatever significant achievement they have made as a regional organisation; Bangladesh has been a “strong contributor” to that.

“In future, we are confident that as an organisation, we will make progress at a pace better than in the past,” Pandey said.

Responding to a question, he said summits provide an opportunity for leaders to engage in conversation both collectively and also bilaterally and it is up to the leaders and member states to decide what kind of bilateral meetings they would have.

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus is scheduled to attend the Bimstec Summit, raising hope for a first-ever in-person meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines.

Preparations are underway and the chief adviser will hold a number of bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the summit, a diplomatic source told UNB, without elaborating further.

Though the two countries – Bangladesh and India – witnessed diplomatic tensions over a number of issues, there is still a possibility that the two leaders can meet to take advantage of the Bimstec platform, said an official, adding that nothing is finalised yet.

The chief adviser has so far visited the United States, Egypt, Azerbaijan and Switzerland and will visit the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to attend the World Governments Summit 2025 being held in Dubai from Tuesday to Thursday.

Responding to a question related to another regional grouping Saarc, Pandey said that Bimstec has its own agenda, goals, vision and charter to forge regional cooperation while the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) which was established on 8 December 1985, has its own agenda.

“Regional organisations coexist together. Regional organisations can continue to coexist and thrive based on member states’ priorities,” he said, adding that they do not see any contradiction.

“That is why I am quite confident, given the commitment of our member states, Bimstec can do much better in the future. We do have a very bright future,” the secretary general added.

Pandey said they have continued to receive full cooperation from Bangladesh irrespective of political changes.

He said they have received assurance at different political levels that in the future Bangladesh will continue extending cooperation and will take the initiative to deepen and strengthen cooperation within Bimstec.

“There is absolutely no doubt in the minds of any of the member states”, he added.

Pandey said he has been given assurances by the political leaders from all the member states that they will continue to attach high importance to Bimstec and they will continue to work together to make it successful, considering the benefits of working together.

Responding to a question on Myanmar, he said that Myanmar has been a very important member of this organisation with its significant contributions.

Bimstec consists of seven member countries, namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Bimstec Secretary General Pandey recently said the summit will have some significant outcomes.

“It will set a direction for the future of Bimstec,” he said.

The Bimstec Summit was earlier scheduled to take place on September 4 last year but it was deferred.

The expected outcomes of the Bimstec Summit are:

Bimstec Bangkok Vision 2030 which is one of the deliverables of Thailand’s Chairmanship to (1) set a clear direction and

goals for Bimstec cooperation, (2) identify key priorities for achieving these goals, (3) promote Bimstec as a space for peace, stability and economic sustainability and (4) enhance cooperation on adaptation to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Rules of procedure for Bimstec Mechanisms will put in place operational mechanisms and define the responsibilities of various structures within Bimstec.

The Sixth Bimstec Summit will have a declaration, expressing the intentions of the Bimstec leaders and actions and achievements during Thailand's Chairmanship.

The declaration would also represent the commitment of all Bimstec member states in line with the Bimstec Bangkok Vision 2030, according to the host country.

There will be a report of the Bimstec Eminent Persons' Group which is a policy recommendation document of the panel of experts to develop Bimstec in accordance with the Bimstec Bangkok Vision 2030.

During Thailand's Chairmanship, Thailand has made every effort to ensure that cooperation within the Bimstec framework is of maximum benefit to the people, according to the Thai Foreign Ministry.

Several concrete examples of economic issues that have been promoted include sustainable and resilient new forms of business, regional connectivity and competitiveness of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

These efforts have enabled people to transport goods at lower costs, especially by sea, and connect entrepreneurs of all sizes to access markets in this region more easily, said the Thai government.

In terms of economic and social security, Thailand focuses on

enhancing food security and public health, in order to allow us to develop cooperation in traditional medicine, expand agricultural product markets and enhance food security with member countries.

Besides, Thailand promotes sustainable tourism in all dimensions, making tourists from India and South Asia the top targets for Thailand's tourism industry.