

BIMSTEC Secretary General's Statement at the 8th Indian Ocean Conference - IOC 2025
(16-17 February 2025, Muscat, Oman)

Excellencies, esteemed audience, ladies and Gentlemen, Namaskar, salaam aaleykum, Good Evening.

I thank the moderator for offering me the floor. I am delighted and privileged to participate at 8th Indian Ocean Conference (IOC). I thank Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs of Oman and Honourable External Affairs Minister of India as well as India Foundation for their invitation; it reflects their recognition of the significant role that BIMSTEC can play in enhancing maritime cooperation in IOR and the importance they attach to BIMSTEC.

Participation of regional organisations like BIMSTEC is a recognition of their significant role in security and sustainable development in IOR. All BIMSTEC member States, except Myanmar, are participating at the 8th IOC, reflecting the importance of IOC as a key platform for multifaceted and multi stakeholders conversations on IOR.

The annual IOC reflects the enduring salience of IOR for regional and global security, global trade and transport, global travel and tourism, access to marine resources and development of blue economy etc. It has been underlined by distinguished speakers during the inaugural and subsequent Sessions.

Bay of Bengal is a strategically significant part of IOR. The combined population of all BIMSTEC member States is estimated at 1.8 billion, their combined GDP amounted in 2023 to over 5 trillion dollars and their external trade was estimated at around 3 trillion dollars in 2023. Key SLOCs, linking Asia and Pacific to Africa, Europe and America, pass through Bay of Bengal.

As regards the maritime landscape of IOR, we all are aware of the persistent threat of conflict in IOR due to growing competition and rivalry amongst key regional and global powers. We witnessed last year the devastating impact of conflict in ME on security in IOR. We are also aware that the rules-based international order is under stress. Various emerging threats to peace, security and development in IOR have already been highlighted by various distinguished speakers and Panelists.

Besides, we continue to confront the traditional challenges to maritime security in IOR: transnational organised crime - piracy, terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking; IUU fishing, marine pollution, maritime disasters, threats to marine ecosystems etc.

BIMSTEC, the only regional organisation in Bay of Bengal, has focused on forging regional maritime cooperation in dealing with the traditional maritime security and developmental challenges.

BIMSTEC has been committed to the paradigm of SAGAR - Security and Growth for all in the region - enunciated by PM of India, around a decade ago.

The unique strengths of BIMSTEC are its non-political nature and its focus on technical and economic cooperation. Further, it brings together two key regions of Asia, South Asia and South East Asia, and it enjoys the political support of all its 7 member States.

India leads cooperation in security sector, including maritime security, as well as disaster management. As regards the areas of Focus in BIMSTEC Maritime Cooperation, in maritime transport, the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation is ready to be signed and adopted at the 6th Summit and there is a proposal to establish a Centre of Excellence in Maritime Transport. A BIMSTEC Ports Conclave was held a couple of years ago and the 2nd Ports Conclave is being scheduled. As regards Maritime domain awareness, there's a proposal to conclude BIMSTEC white shipping agreement. There are proposals to hold Joint Maritime Security Exercises and Joint focused Operations. BIMSTEC guiding principles for conduct of the maritime law enforcement agencies have been finalised. As regards HADR, we have finalised the guidelines on maritime component of HADR; a Plan of Action is being finalised, 3 rounds of disaster management exercises have been held and the next round has been planned. Further, a Centre of Excellence for disaster management is planned to be set up. We are holding discussions on coordinated regional response to maritime oil pollution. As regards Blue Economy, an Expert Group has been set up. Bangladesh is the lead member State for cooperation in blue economy sector and the first meeting of the Expert Group is being scheduled.

BIMSTEC is ready to engage in cooperation with other regional and international organisations like ASEAN, IORA, UNODC, UNDRR and CDRI with a view to deepen and expand maritime cooperation in IOR.

BIMSTEC has adopted its Charter, it has defined its collective vision, it has a vast Agenda, comprising 15 Sectors, it has core and sectoral institutional mechanisms in place to forge cooperation and it has Master Plans and Action Plans in various sectors for guiding regional cooperation.

Let me conclude by sharing with you my belief that BIMSTEC is poised to emerge as a vibrant and dynamic regional organisation. It is committed to pursue technical and economic cooperation for ensuring security, growth and sustainable development in Bay of Bengal. Our success will contribute to security, growth and development in IOR.

BIMSTEC shall continue its voyage to new horizons of maritime partnership in Bay of Bengal and beyond. I commend India Foundation and the Government of Oman for organising the IOC successfully and extending hospitality to me. I thank you all for your kind attention. I wish you all a joyful evening. Thank you!