

Myanmar FM to attend BIMSTEC meet.

It is better to engage Myanmar rather than “isolate” the country, said Sri Lanka’s Foreign Secretary Admiral Jayanath Colombage (retired), explaining Colombo’s decision to invite Myanmar military administration’s Foreign Minister to the fifth Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) summit this week.

Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa will host Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other leaders at the summit being held in “hybrid mode” from March 28 to 30. Mr. Rajapaksa will chair the session on March 30, with leaders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Thailand joining him virtually. Myanmar’s Foreign Minister will speak at the session, officials in Colombo said.

This is the first time that Mr. Modi — joining the event virtually — will be at a forum that includes the military junta-run ‘State Administrative Council’ (SAC). External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will participate in the BIMSTEC ministerial meeting in person.

Last year, Colombo invited Myanmar’s junta-appointed Foreign Minister — just over a month after the military’s power grab — for the virtual meeting of the regional body, sparking criticism from pro-democracy activists in Myanmar.

Commenting on the scope of the summit, Mr. Colombage told The Hindu that BIMSTEC must now “walk the talk” on regional cooperation. “We need more travel options, people to people connectivity, economic engagement, and trade among members,” he said.



The MEA did not respond to requests for a comment on the inclusion of Myanmar Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin to address the group virtually, an apparent departure from the line taken by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) that decided in February not to invite the Foreign Minister to its retreat. It asked Myanmar to send only a “non-political” representative.

On the inclusion of the junta administration on the guest list, Mr. Colombage said, “Inviting Myanmar to join the summit virtually does not amount to Sri Lanka recognising what is happening in Myanmar. At the same time, rather than isolating a country, it is better to have them in your fold, and talk to them, discuss, engage.”

However, admitting that it was “difficult to interact with a military leadership running the country,” the former naval chief-turned-bureaucrat said it was through discussion and engagement that “practical and pragmatic solutions” can be found.

He said it was time for BIMSTEC to show determination and make things happen, for it represented “a very important region” linking the “Western Pacific and Indian Ocean, and between the Pacific and SAARC.”

One of the main objectives of this week’s summit would be to launch the ‘BIMSTEC charter’, and hand over the leadership of the forum to Thailand, the next chair, he added.

Mr. Jaishankar will participate in the Foreign Ministers’ meet on March 29, which will include the Myanmar Foreign Minister. In December last year, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla visited Myanmar and met with the coup leader SAC chief General Min Aung Hlaing, who overthrew the National Unity Government (NUG) and imprisoned all leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi. India’s bilateral engagement with the Myanmar military rulers has been at odds with the stance of Western countries. Mr. Jaishankar had said at a Quad ministerial meeting in Melbourne that India will not recognise “unilateral sanctions”.

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Expected Question (Prelims Exams)

Q. Consider the following statements regarding BIMSTEC.

1. The member countries of BIMSTEC includes Bangladesh, India, Srilanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan.
2. The fifth summit of BIMSTEC will be held in colombo.

which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) None

Expected Question (Mains Exams)

Q. What is BIMSTEC? Discuss the significance of BIMSTEC for India. (250 Words)

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Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.