

**BIMSTEC**

# India committed to regional connectivity: PM

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MAKING A strong pitch for enhanced regional connectivity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Thursday said India is committed to work with the BIMSTEC member states in the critical sector and to combat terrorism and drug trafficking.

"I believe that there is a big opportunity for connectivity — trade connectivity, economic connectivity, transport connectivity, digital connectivity, and people-to-people connectivity," he said while addressing the inaugural session of the 4th BIMSTEC summit.

The BIMSTEC is a regional grouping comprising India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal.

"India is committed to work with the BIMSTEC member states to enhance regional connectivity," Modi said.

The Prime Minister said this region has become a meeting point for India's Neighbourhood First and Act East policies. "The Bay of Bengal holds special significance for the security and development of all of us," he said.

"There is no country in the region which has not suffered from terrorism and trans-national crimes such as drug trafficking linked to networks of terrorism," he told the summit, which was inaugurated by Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli.

Modi said India is ready to host a conference under BIMSTEC framework on narcotics related topics. "This is not a law and order problem of one country. We must unite to tackle these problems," he said.

The BIMSTEC member states



PM Narendra Modi being received by Nepal counterpart KP Sharma Oli, in Kathmandu. PTI

situated between the Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal face frequent natural disasters such as flood, cyclone and earthquake, Modi said, and called for "cooperation and coordination" among them in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts.

"We not only have diplomatic relations with all BIMSTEC countries but (we) are strongly connected by civilisation, history, art, language, cuisine and shared culture," the Prime Minister said.

Prime Minister Modi said India will host International Buddhist Conclave in August 2020 and invited all BIMSTEC leaders to attend the event as guest of honour.

Modi hoped that the BIM-

STEC member states will attend the India Mobile Congress in New Delhi scheduled for October.

He said India's North Eastern states would play a key role in enhancing connectivity with the BIMSTEC countries.

Briefing the media after the inaugural session of the Summit, Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale said BIMSTEC fits very well with India's neighbourhood policy and the policy to develop the North-East region.

"It's going to be a landmark summit for the regional grouping as it will set a framework for institutional development of the BIMSTEC," he said.

The summit was attended by Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Sri Lankan

President Maithripala Sirisena, Thailand Premier Prayut Chan-o-cha, Myanmar's President Win Myint and Chief Advisor to the Government of Bhutan Gyalpo Tshering Wangchuk.

Addressing the summit, Nepal Prime Minister Oli said BIMSTEC is not a substitute for SAARC and the two organisations can complement each other.

Oli underlined the need for implementing the BIMSTEC poverty plan as well as Millennium Development Goals for the common benefit of the member states. He stressed on the need for deeper economic integration and collaboration among the member states for speedy development of the region.

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Modi with Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina. PTI