

BIMSTEC invite indicates India shaping alternative regional platform: Former Indian diplomat

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Synopsis

Talmiz Ahmad said that SAARC has been a non-starter for several years because of the state of Indo-Pak relations.



Agencies

Hyderabad-The decision to invite BIMSTEC leaders for the prime minister's swearing-in ceremony indicates that India is now shaping an alternative regional engagement platform as SAARC has no basis to go forward, says a former Indian diplomat.

India had invited SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) leaders for a similar event in 2014.

The BIMSTEC member-states are Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan.

Talmiz Ahmad, who had served as an Indian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE, said on Thursday that SAARC has been a non-starter for several years because of the state of Indo-Pak relations.

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BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) has almost all members of SAARC minus Pakistan, he said.



The BIMSTEC member-states are Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan.

"And BIMSTEC is a much looser organisation in that SAARC is more structured. SAARC requires you...whatever you offer to one country you have to offer to others," Ahmad told PTI.

Noting that BIMSTEC is still taking shape, he said it is made up of India's neighbouring countries, centred around Bay of Bengal and gives New Delhi an opportunity, if it so wishes, to engage with Afghanistan and Maldives on bilateral basis.

"BIMSTEC does not preclude our engagement with Afghanistan and Maldives which are other members of SAARC. So, BIMSTEC has all members of SAARC minus Afghanistan and Maldives which we can engage with separately", Ahmad said.

"So, BIMSTEC (invitation to its leaders for the ceremony) indicates that India is now shaping an alternative regional engagement platform because SAARC has no basis to go forward...it's regrettable but it's a fact of history, it (SAARC) is not going to go anywhere for the time being".

In this situation, BIMSTEC has been given certain significance by the Narendra Modi government and inviting its leaders for the swearing-in indicates a very strong message that BIMSTEC would receive considerable attention from India, according to him.

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