**BIMSTEC gets ‘legal personality’ after charter comes into force**

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) will now be open to new members and observers after a historic first charter of the grouping came into force on May 20, the Ministry of External Affairs has announced.

With the charter having been adopted in the 5th summit of the BIMSTEC leaders, the grouping has acquired a ‘legal personality’ and will be able to enter into structured diplomatic dialogue with other groupings and countries.

“The entry into force of the BIMSTEC Charter reaffirms India’s commitment to a prosperous, peaceful and sustainable neighbourhood.BIMSTEC reflects the synthesis of ourNeighbourhood First and Act East policies,” said External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. Official Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the charter will provide “legal and institutional framework for meaningful cooperation and deeper integration of the Bay of Bengal region.” BIMSTEC was formed in 1997 but for a long time, the organisation could not form consensus among its seven member states — Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Thailand, Myanmar and India — about a common charter that could sum up the vision of the grouping.