

# BIMSTEC: Appraisal through Governance Lens

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## Policy Brief

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### Background

BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) is a regional organization founded in 1997, comprising seven member states: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. This organization seeks to foster multifaceted technical and economic cooperation among its members, which together represent a population of around 1.5 billion people and a combined GDP exceeding USD 3.8 trillion. However, the success of regional cooperation—both within BIMSTEC and in broader contexts—is inherently linked to the governance structures of the member countries, among other factors.

Governance refers to the frameworks, processes, and practices through which governments, institutions, or organizations are directed, managed, and controlled. It includes the mechanisms through which stakeholders articulate their interests, exercise their rights, fulfill their obligations, and resolve conflicts. Effective governance is characterized by principles such as accountability, transparency, participation, and the rule of law. These principles are crucial for ensuring that institutions serve the public interest and maintain the trust of citizens. The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), a comprehensive research project by the World Bank, provides cross-country governance indicators across six key dimensions, covering over 200 countries and territories since 1996.

### Voice and Accountability

Voice and Accountability is a critical governance indicator that assesses the extent to which citizens can participate in choosing their government and the degree of freedom of expression, association, and independent media. It provides insights into the democratic processes, political freedoms, and civic engagement within a country. By evaluating this indicator across BIMSTEC countries, it becomes evident that there are significant disparities in governance and citizen empowerment (Figure 1).

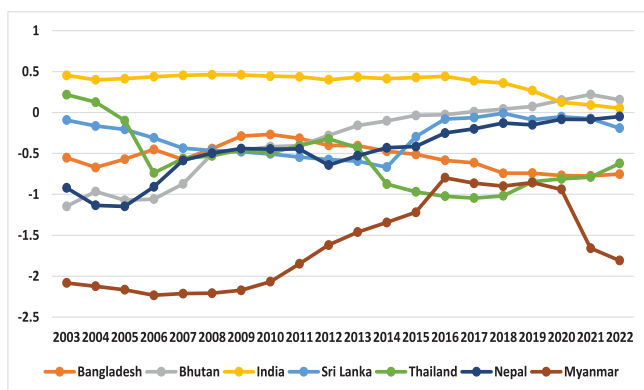
Bhutan, on the other hand, has shown a remarkable upward trajectory in recent years. Its transition to a constitutional monarchy and subsequent democratic reforms have significantly enhanced political participation and civil liberties. This improvement is indicative of Bhutan's focused efforts on strengthening institutions, promoting transparency, and expanding civic space.

India generally scores in the positive range, reflecting its strong democratic traditions and relatively free media environment. However, minor fluctuations suggest underlying concerns, such as pressures on journalistic independence and challenges related to communal harmony, which occasionally test the robustness of its democratic framework. Nevertheless, India's stability in this indicator underscores the resilience of its electoral processes and civic freedoms.

Sri Lanka and Thailand exhibit considerable volatility in their Voice and Accountability scores. Sri Lanka's governance landscape has been shaped by periodic political upheavals, including constitutional crises and shifts in leadership, which often coincide with restrictions on freedoms. Similarly, Thailand has experienced cycles of military interventions and authoritarian rule, punctuated by brief democratic phases, leading to oscillations in political rights and civil liberties.

Nepal and Myanmar, however, consistently record low scores, pointing to deeper governance challenges. Nepal's political instability, marked by frequent changes in government and challenges in implementing its federal structure, undermines citizens' confidence in governance processes. Myanmar faces even graver issues, particularly since the military coup in 2021, which has led to widespread suppression of freedoms, arrests of political leaders, and a complete breakdown of democratic institutions.

Figure 1: Voice and Accountability



Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators

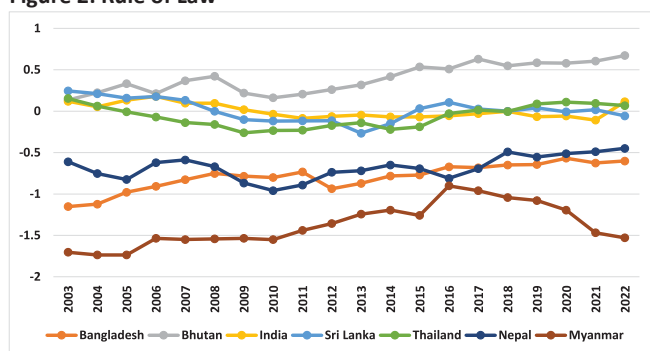
Bangladesh, for instance, demonstrates slight fluctuations in its scores, but these have consistently remained in the negative range. This trend reflects ongoing challenges in promoting citizen participation, safeguarding media independence, and ensuring freedom of expression. Issues such as government control over the media, suppression of dissent, and restrictions on civil society organizations contribute to these persistent governance problems.

This comparative analysis of Voice and Accountability underscores the varying degrees of progress and regression among BIMSTEC countries. While some nations have made notable strides in empowering citizens and fostering participatory governance, others continue to struggle with entrenched political instability, authoritarian tendencies, and limitations on fundamental freedoms. Addressing these disparities requires sustained efforts to promote democratic norms, safeguard media independence, and ensure that all citizens can freely express their voices in governance processes.

## Rule of Law

The Rule of Law indicator evaluates the extent to which citizens have confidence in and abide by a country's legal framework. This includes critical aspects such as the enforcement of contracts, protection of property rights, the effectiveness and impartiality of the judiciary, and the performance of police and other law enforcement agencies. Analyzing this indicator across BIMSTEC countries reveals significant variations, reflecting the diverse legal and institutional landscapes within the region (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Rule of Law



Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators

Bangladesh has shown marginal improvement in its Rule of Law scores over time, but they remain relatively low. Persistent challenges in the legal system include judicial backlogs, politicization of the judiciary, and inefficiencies in law enforcement. Corruption and lack of transparency further erode public confidence in the legal system. Although recent reforms, such as efforts to digitize court records and streamline judicial processes, are steps in the right direction, their impact has been limited by systemic inefficiencies and resource constraints.

Bhutan consistently maintains positive scores in the Rule of Law indicator, reflecting a robust and well-functioning legal framework. This performance is attributed to its effective judiciary, strong emphasis on transparency, and relatively low levels of corruption. Bhutan's legal institutions enjoy a high degree of public trust, bolstered by the country's adherence to its constitutional mandates and the promotion of good governance.

India has witnessed significant improvements in Rule of Law scores during certain years, which can be linked to reforms in its legal and judicial systems. Efforts to modernize the judiciary, such as the establishment of e-courts and fast-track courts, have enhanced efficiency in some areas. However, challenges such as judicial delays, uneven enforcement of laws, and occasional allegations of judicial overreach remain. Despite these hurdles, India's Rule of Law scores generally reflect the strength of its democratic institutions and an active civil society that holds authorities accountable.

Sri Lanka and Thailand exhibit mixed performances, with scores that fluctuate over time. Sri Lanka's legal system has faced periods

of inefficiency and corruption, often tied to political instability. High-profile cases of judicial interference by the executive branch and delays in legal processes have occasionally undermined public trust. Similarly, Thailand's Rule of Law scores have experienced dips during periods of military rule and political unrest, when judicial independence and the enforcement of laws have been questioned.

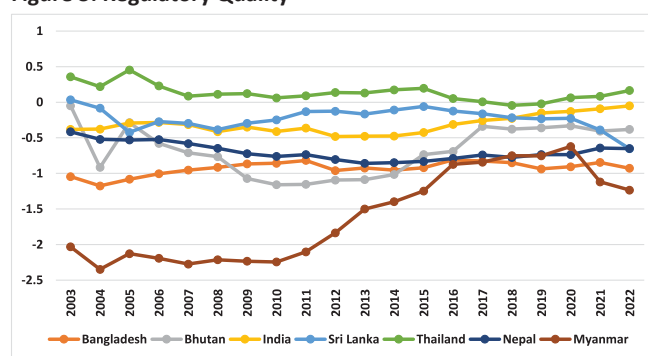
Nepal and Myanmar consistently record low scores, highlighting profound weaknesses in their legal systems. In Nepal, challenges such as judicial politicization, inadequate resources, and frequent changes in government hinder the judiciary's ability to function effectively. In Myanmar, the situation is even more dire, especially following the military coup in 2021, which dismantled judicial independence and replaced it with military-controlled tribunals. Corruption, lack of access to justice, and systemic bias against vulnerable groups exacerbate the erosion of public trust in legal institutions in both countries.

This analysis of the Rule of Law indicator underscores the importance of robust legal frameworks in fostering public confidence and ensuring equitable governance. While some BIMSTEC countries, such as Bhutan and India, have demonstrated progress in strengthening their legal systems, others, particularly Nepal and Myanmar, face significant challenges. Addressing these disparities requires comprehensive judicial reforms, improved enforcement mechanisms, and measures to uphold the independence and integrity of legal institutions. Such efforts are essential not only for improving governance within individual countries but also for fostering regional stability and cooperation.

## Regulatory Quality

The Regulatory Quality indicator measures a government's capacity to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that enable private sector development, encourage investment, and foster economic growth. A comparative analysis of this indicator across BIMSTEC countries highlights varying levels of success in creating regulatory environments conducive to economic activities (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Regulatory Quality



Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators

Bangladesh has made some strides in improving regulatory quality, yet its scores remain in the negative range. This underscores persistent challenges in policy design and enforcement, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, frequent changes in regulatory frameworks, and inadequate stakeholder consultation in policymaking. Issues such as inconsistent implementation of tax and trade policies, burdensome licensing requirements, and weak regulatory oversight of key sectors deter private sector confidence. Recent efforts, including initiatives to streamline business registration processes and reform the ease of doing business,

signal potential for improvement, but systemic barriers continue to impede significant progress.

Bhutan has demonstrated steady improvement in its regulatory quality, reflecting a commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment. The country's positive scores are attributed to streamlined procedures, transparent governance, and proactive reforms aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and private sector participation. Bhutan's focus on sustainable development, coupled with policies that balance economic growth and environmental conservation, enhances its regulatory credibility and appeal to investors.

India experiences fluctuations in its Regulatory Quality scores, indicative of varying success in policy reforms and their implementation. Significant advancements have been made in areas such as ease of doing business, foreign direct investment (FDI) liberalization, and infrastructure development. Initiatives like the Goods and Services Tax (GST) reform and digitization of government services demonstrate India's commitment to improving regulatory efficiency. However, challenges persist, including bureaucratic red tape, uneven implementation across states, and delays in critical regulatory approvals, which occasionally undermine policy effectiveness.

Sri Lanka and Thailand also exhibit fluctuating scores in regulatory quality, often reflecting periods of policy uncertainty or instability. In Sri Lanka, the regulatory environment has been affected by economic crises and political instability, leading to inconsistent policies that deter private investment. Similarly, Thailand's regulatory framework faces challenges during times of political unrest or military rule, which often result in abrupt policy changes and weakened investor confidence. Both countries have implemented reforms to address these issues, but sustained efforts are needed to ensure stability and consistency in regulatory governance.

Nepal and Myanmar consistently perform poorly on this indicator, pointing to deep-seated obstacles in their regulatory frameworks. In Nepal, complex bureaucratic procedures, frequent policy reversals, and limited institutional capacity hinder private sector growth. Myanmar's regulatory environment is even more precarious, particularly in the aftermath of the military coup in 2021, which has disrupted economic governance and led to arbitrary policy decisions. Widespread corruption, lack of transparency, and limited rule of law further exacerbate regulatory inefficiencies in both countries, stifling business activities and economic progress.

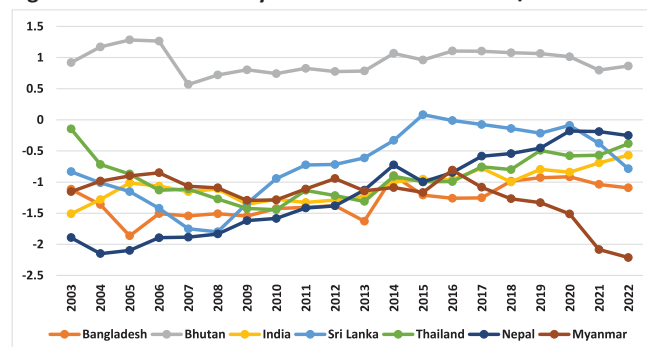
The analysis of Regulatory Quality across BIMSTEC countries underscores the critical role of effective governance in promoting private sector development and economic growth. Countries like Bhutan and, to some extent, India have made notable progress, demonstrating that targeted reforms and consistent policy implementation can significantly enhance regulatory environments. In contrast, the persistent challenges faced by countries like Nepal and Myanmar highlight the need for comprehensive institutional reforms, capacity building, and anti-corruption measures. A stable and transparent regulatory framework is essential for attracting investment, fostering innovation, and driving sustainable development across the region.

## Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism

The Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism indicator evaluates the degree to which a country experiences political

stability and is free from the threat of politically motivated violence or terrorism. This measure is crucial for understanding the security environment, governance effectiveness, and the overall risk landscape within a nation. A comparative analysis of this indicator across BIMSTEC countries reveals varying levels of stability and vulnerability to violence, shaped by historical, political, and socio-economic factors (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism



Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators

Bangladesh has shown slight improvement in its scores over the years, but they remain in the negative range. This reflects ongoing concerns about political instability, electoral violence, and sporadic acts of terrorism. Political rivalry between major parties frequently manifests in street protests, strikes, and violence, disrupting public life and economic activities. Although law enforcement agencies have made efforts to curb terrorism and maintain order, challenges such as communal tensions and dissatisfaction with governance continue to affect stability.

Bhutan stands out as a model of political stability within the BIMSTEC region, consistently maintaining high scores on this indicator. Its peaceful transition to a constitutional monarchy and the promotion of Gross National Happiness as a guiding development philosophy have fostered a cohesive and stable political environment. Low levels of violence, combined with a proactive approach to conflict resolution and public consultation, ensure Bhutan's position as one of the most politically stable countries in the region.

India exhibits fluctuating scores, reflecting periods of both stability and heightened tensions. While India's democratic institutions provide a framework for political resilience, challenges such as insurgencies in northeastern states, Maoist activities, and terrorist attacks periodically disrupt stability. Communal tensions and regional political dynamics also contribute to instability in certain areas. Despite these challenges, India's overall trajectory remains positive, supported by its robust institutional framework and counter-terrorism measures.

Sri Lanka continues to display volatile scores, shaped by its history of prolonged civil conflict and episodes of political violence. Although the end of the civil war in 2009 brought a measure of peace, political instability and occasional unrest have persisted, particularly during times of economic crisis or political turmoil. Recent incidents, such as the 2019 Easter bombings, underscore the continued vulnerability to violence and the need for comprehensive security and reconciliation strategies.

Thailand reflects similar volatility in its Political Stability scores, driven by repeated cycles of political unrest, military coups, and protests. Periods of civilian rule are often interrupted by military interventions, undermining long-term political stability.

Additionally, insurgencies in Thailand's southern provinces contribute to the country's challenges in maintaining peace and security. Despite efforts to address these issues, the deeply entrenched political polarization continues to pose risks to stability.

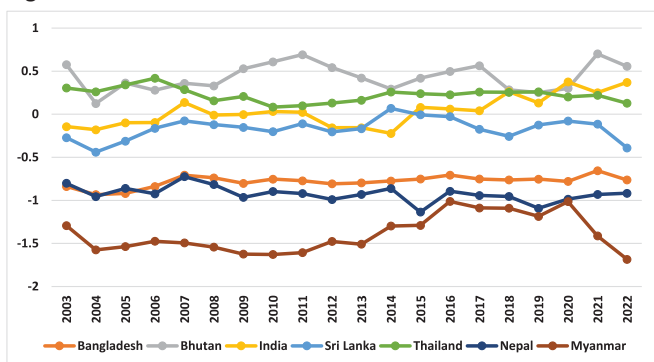
Nepal and Myanmar consistently record very low scores on this indicator, highlighting severe and entrenched political instability. Nepal's challenges stem from frequent government changes, fragile coalition politics, and struggles in implementing its federal constitution, leading to a volatile political environment. Myanmar faces even graver challenges, particularly following the military coup in 2021, which dismantled democratic institutions and triggered widespread violence. Ethnic conflicts, internal displacement, and human rights abuses further exacerbate the instability in both countries, creating significant barriers to peace and development.

This analysis of the Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism indicator underscores the complex and diverse challenges faced by BIMSTEC countries. While Bhutan and, to a lesser extent, India, exemplify relative stability, the persistent instability in countries like Myanmar and Nepal highlights the need for targeted interventions. Addressing these issues requires strengthening democratic institutions, promoting inclusive governance, and implementing comprehensive conflict resolution and counter-terrorism strategies. A stable political environment is not only vital for domestic peace but also critical for fostering regional cooperation and development within the BIMSTEC framework.

## Government Effectiveness

The Government Effectiveness indicator evaluates the quality of public services, the competence and independence of the civil service, and the effectiveness of policy formulation and implementation. It is a crucial measure of how well governments can deliver services and implement development policies. An analysis of this indicator across BIMSTEC countries highlights substantial variations in governance capacity and public service efficiency (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Government effectiveness



Source: *Worldwide Governance Indicators*

Bangladesh has shown some improvement over time, but its scores remain negative, reflecting persistent inefficiencies in government service delivery and policy implementation. Challenges such as bureaucratic delays, politicization of the civil service, and resource constraints continue to hinder effective governance. While reforms such as digitization initiatives and the establishment of service centers aim to improve efficiency, systemic corruption and uneven

implementation of policies often dilute their impact. This highlights the need for a stronger focus on capacity-building and transparency in public administration.

Bhutan consistently scores positively, making it a standout performer in government effectiveness within the BIMSTEC region. The country's governance model emphasizes efficiency, accountability, and inclusivity, contributing to robust public service delivery. Bhutan's relatively small population, combined with its emphasis on good governance and sustainable development, enables the government to deliver high-quality services effectively. Strategic investments in health, education, and digital governance further enhance its performance in this indicator.

India exhibits fluctuating scores, reflecting periods of both progress and setbacks. Improvements in government effectiveness during certain years can be attributed to initiatives such as the adoption of e-governance, efforts to streamline public service delivery, and the implementation of large-scale social programs like Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT). However, challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, inter-state variations in service delivery, and the burden of a vast and diverse population pose ongoing obstacles. Strengthening coordination between central and state governments and addressing capacity gaps remain key priorities.

Sri Lanka and Thailand have experienced declines in their scores during periods of political instability and turmoil, underscoring the adverse impact of governance disruptions on public service delivery. In Sri Lanka, economic crises and political upheavals have strained government resources and undermined civil service capacity, leading to inefficiencies. Similarly, Thailand's cycles of military coups and protests have disrupted governance, resulting in inconsistent service delivery and weakened public trust in institutions. Stabilizing the political environment and strengthening institutional frameworks are critical for improving government effectiveness in both countries.

Nepal and Myanmar consistently record low scores, reflecting profound challenges in governance and public administration. In Nepal, frequent changes in government, limited institutional capacity, and poor infrastructure hamper effective policy implementation. Public service delivery is further constrained by corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency. In Myanmar, the situation is dire, particularly after the military coup in 2021, which has decimated the civil service, disrupted essential services, and eroded governance capacity. Widespread conflict and a lack of legitimacy in governance exacerbate the challenges in both countries.

The analysis of Government Effectiveness across BIMSTEC countries underscores the importance of strengthening institutional capacity and ensuring efficient service delivery to foster development. Bhutan serves as an example of how strategic governance and accountability can drive effective public administration. For countries like Nepal, Myanmar, and to some extent Bangladesh, addressing systemic inefficiencies, enhancing civil service capacity, and prioritizing transparency are crucial steps. Building resilient governance frameworks is essential for improving public services and driving sustainable development across the region.

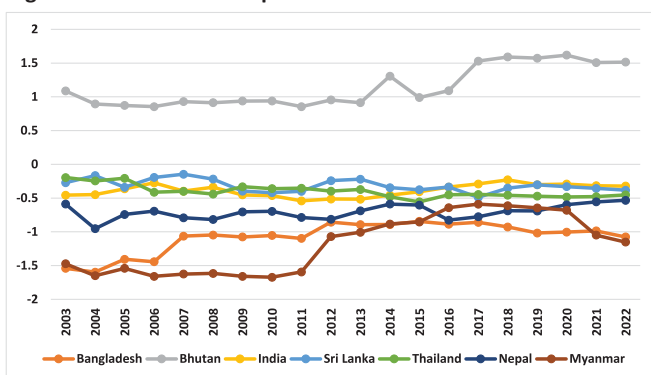
## Control of Corruption

The Control of Corruption indicator evaluates how effectively a government prevents and addresses corruption, including the

misuse of public office for private gain and the undue influence of elites over state institutions. This measure is critical for assessing governance quality, public trust, and the integrity of institutions. Across the BIMSTEC countries, a mixed picture emerges, with significant disparities in their ability to combat corruption and uphold transparency (Figure 6).

Bangladesh has experienced fluctuations in its scores, but they consistently remain in the negative range, highlighting deep-rooted issues with corruption. The prevalence of bribery, favouritism in public procurement, and lack of accountability within state institutions undermine governance and public trust. Efforts such as the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and digitization of public services have had limited impact, often hindered by political interference and a lack of enforcement. Addressing these challenges requires stronger institutional autonomy, stricter enforcement of anti-corruption laws, and greater transparency in governance.

**Figure 6: Control of Corruption**



Source: *Worldwide Governance Indicators*

Bhutan stands out as a leader in controlling corruption, consistently achieving positive scores. The country's strong performance is attributed to its robust institutional framework, including an independent Anti-Corruption Commission, and a cultural emphasis on integrity and accountability. Bhutan's governance model, which prioritizes transparency and ethical standards, has successfully minimized opportunities for corruption, fostering high levels of public trust in its institutions.

India exhibits fluctuating scores, reflecting periods of both progress and setbacks. Significant improvements in certain years can be linked to high-profile anti-corruption campaigns, the introduction of the Lokpal (ombudsman) framework, and efforts to digitize government services, reducing opportunities for petty corruption. However, systemic challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, regulatory complexities, and high levels of political corruption continue to pose obstacles. Strengthening institutional mechanisms, enhancing whistleblower protections, and increasing public awareness are key to sustaining progress in this area.

Sri Lanka and Thailand demonstrate score volatility, indicative of periods where corruption levels have escalated, often coinciding with political instability or economic crises. In Sri Lanka, issues such as nepotism, mismanagement of public funds, and lack of accountability in governance are prevalent. Similarly, Thailand has struggled with corruption at both the administrative and political levels, exacerbated during times of military rule or political turmoil. Both countries have implemented anti-corruption measures, including the establishment of commissions and public awareness campaigns, but enforcement remains inconsistent.

Nepal and Myanmar consistently score poorly, reflecting profound difficulties in controlling corruption. In Nepal, weak governance, widespread bribery, and entrenched patronage networks undermine anti-corruption efforts. Limited institutional capacity and frequent political changes further exacerbate the issue. In Myanmar, the situation is even more severe, especially following the military coup in 2021, which has deepened the culture of impunity and lack of accountability. Corruption is pervasive across public institutions, from local administrations to the highest levels of government, with little to no effective oversight.

This analysis of the Control of Corruption indicator underscores the importance of strong institutions, political will, and public participation in combating corruption. Bhutan serves as an example of how a comprehensive and culturally aligned anti-corruption strategy can yield positive outcomes. For countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar, tackling corruption requires systemic reforms, independent oversight mechanisms, and increased transparency in governance processes. Addressing corruption is essential not only for improving governance but also for fostering economic growth, attracting investment, and building public trust across the BIMSTEC region.

## Recommendations

Governance remains a critical determinant of development outcomes across the BIMSTEC region. Based on the analysis of governance indicators, the following tailored recommendations aim to address the specific challenges faced by member states and enhance governance capacity:

### 1. Enhance Citizen Participation and Media Freedoms

Countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar should prioritize fostering political participation and safeguarding freedoms of expression and the press.

- **Legal Reforms:** Enact and enforce legislation that protects civil liberties, prevents censorship, and ensures the independence of media institutions. Laws that penalize the suppression of dissent and encourage investigative journalism are particularly important.
- **Civil Society Engagement:** Strengthen the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in governance by providing them with platforms to engage in policy dialogue and hold governments accountable.
- **Digital Freedoms:** Ensure digital platforms remain accessible and free from undue state interference, as they are increasingly vital spaces for public discourse and advocacy.

Such measures can significantly improve **Voice and Accountability** scores and contribute to inclusive governance.

### 2. Strengthen the Rule of Law

Countries with persistently low Rule of Law scores—Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar—must focus on enhancing the integrity and capacity of their judicial systems.

- **Judicial Independence:** Guarantee the independence of courts by protecting them from political interference and ensuring transparent appointment processes for judges.
- **Contract Enforcement and Property Rights:** Modernize legal frameworks governing contracts and property rights, and establish mechanisms for swift dispute resolution to encourage investor confidence.
- **Capacity Building:** Invest in training for law enforcement agencies and judiciary personnel to improve their efficiency, professionalism, and public accountability.

By addressing these areas, governments can boost public confidence in the legal framework and strengthen governance foundations.

### 3. Improve Regulatory Quality and Policy Implementation

Enhancing the ability to design and execute effective policies is essential for fostering sustainable economic growth, particularly in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar.

- **Transparent Regulations:** Develop clear, consistent, and easily accessible regulatory frameworks to eliminate ambiguities and reduce the scope for rent-seeking behaviors.
- **Stakeholder Involvement:** Engage private sector representatives, CSOs, and local communities in the policy formulation process to ensure policies are both inclusive and practical.
- **Technology Integration:** Leverage digital tools and platforms to simplify regulatory compliance processes, reducing bureaucratic delays and increasing efficiency.

A predictable and business-friendly regulatory environment will promote private sector development and improve **Regulatory Quality** scores.

### 4. Address Political Instability and Violence

Low **Political Stability and Absence of Violence** scores in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar highlight the urgent need to address underlying causes of conflict and instability.

- **Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** Establish inclusive peacebuilding processes that involve marginalized groups, political factions, and local communities to address grievances and build trust.
- **Strengthen Democratic Institutions:** Reinforce the integrity and transparency of electoral systems to reduce political tensions and foster trust in democratic processes.
- **Early Warning Systems:** Develop systems to monitor and mitigate the risk of political violence, including mechanisms for de-escalating conflicts during politically charged periods.

Improved political stability will create a safer environment for investment, governance, and social development.

### 5. Tackle Corruption through Institutional Reforms

Corruption remains a significant barrier to effective governance in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar, requiring targeted reforms to enhance accountability and transparency.

- **Strengthen Anti-Corruption Institutions:** Provide anti-corruption bodies with adequate resources, autonomy, and enforcement powers to investigate and prosecute corruption cases impartially.
- **Transparency Measures:** Mandate regular publication of government spending, procurement processes, and asset declarations by public officials to deter corrupt practices.
- **Whistleblower Protections:** Enact strong legal protections for individuals who report corrupt activities, ensuring their safety and incentivizing disclosure of wrongdoing.

Addressing corruption through these measures will foster public trust in institutions and improve the **Control of Corruption** scores across these nations.

The BIMSTEC countries face diverse governance challenges, but many share common underlying issues such as weak institutional frameworks, corruption, and political instability. Addressing these challenges through targeted, country-specific reforms can enhance governance capacity, foster economic development, and strengthen regional cooperation. Collaboration within the BIMSTEC framework, including sharing best practices and expertise, can further accelerate progress toward improved governance in the region.

## Conclusion

The governance indicators offer critical insights into the political, administrative, and institutional landscapes of BIMSTEC member states, highlighting significant variations in governance quality across the region. These differences have profound implications for the effectiveness and success of regional cooperation efforts within BIMSTEC. Countries with strong governance indicators, such as Bhutan, are better equipped to drive regional initiatives, promote stability, and attract investment, thus positioning themselves as natural leaders in fostering regional integration. On the other hand, countries with weaker governance frameworks, like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar, face significant challenges that could hinder their ability to contribute effectively to regional collaboration.

The disparities in governance quality also impact the region's ability to address shared challenges such as political instability, economic development, climate change, and security concerns. For BIMSTEC to realize its full potential as a cohesive and effective regional organization, it must prioritize efforts to reduce governance gaps across its member states. This can be achieved by fostering a cooperative environment where stronger countries assist those with weaker governance systems, through knowledge-sharing, capacity-building initiatives, and the promotion of best practices. Additionally, supporting democratic institutions, improving legal frameworks, and addressing corruption will help enhance governance quality in countries with lower scores, ensuring that they can participate more effectively in regional decision-making.

Ultimately, addressing these governance disparities is essential for BIMSTEC to operate as a unified and impactful regional bloc. Strengthening governance structures will not only improve the functioning of the organization but also contribute to the broader goals of regional integration, sustainable development, and long-term peace and stability. To achieve this, BIMSTEC must prioritize governance reforms, enhance dialogue and cooperation among member states, and ensure that regional policies are inclusive and responsive to the needs of all member countries.

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