

# **Leveraging Thematic Circuits Towarda BIMSTEC 2030 Tourism Strategy**

25 November 2020, Dhaka

- Mr. Tadateru Hayashi, Officer-in-Charge, Regional Cooperation & Operations Coordination Division, South Asia Department, Asian Development Bank;
- Distinguished Participants from the Member States;
- Senior Officials and Consultants from ADB
- Ladies and Gentlemen;

## ***Good Morning!***

It is a great privilege for me to address this important workshop with the objective to obtain feedback and comments on the draft ADB study report–titled “*Leveraging Thematic Circuits Toward a BIMSTEC 2030 Tourism Strategy*” which is jointly organized by the BIMSTEC Secretariat and the Asian Development Bank.

At the outset, I would like to welcome all the distinguished participants from the Member States to this workshop. As you may know I have assumed my charges as the Secretary General of BIMSTEC on 06 November 2020.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to ADB for supporting BIMSTEC activities since 2006 through assistance in developing the BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study. My appreciation also goes to ADB for extending its Technical Assistance (TA) to BIMSTEC and undertaking three important studies on Trade Facilitation, Tourism Promotion and Transport Connectivity Infrastructure Financing.

## **Distinguished Participants**

In order to bring ourselves into the context of today’s workshop, let me briefly outline some of the activities of the BIMSTEC tourism sector since its identification as one of the first areas of cooperation under BIMSTEC in December 1998:

- **The First BIMSTEC Summit** was held in Bangkok on 31 July 2004 which emphasized the need for joint marketing of tourism, exchange of visits and sharing of information.
- To fulfill this aspiration of the Leaders, three institutional mechanisms were established. **First, the BIMSTEC Tourism Ministers' Roundtable Workshop**, which is the highest policy making body; **Second, the BIMSTEC Working Group on Tourism** which is mandated to study regional tourism, recommend policies to the ministerial committee and monitor the Plan of Action on Tourism;
- And the **Third** mechanism established, the **BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators** to bring the tour operators of the region closer, strengthen cooperation and develop regional tour programs to benefit all Member States.
- The Tourism Ministers' Roundtable Workshop has so far met twice. The First Meeting was held in Kolkata in February 2005 and the Second in Kathmandu in August 2006. The outcomes of these two Meetings were the development of a **Plan of Action for Tourism Development and Promotion for the BIMSTEC Region** and the **Kathmandu Declaration on Tourism Cooperation**.
- The **BIMSTEC Working Group on Tourism** consists of representatives from national tourism organizations and private stakeholders of tourism industries from all Member States. The **First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Working Group on Tourism** was held on 23rd September in 2013 in New Delhi. The meeting agreed to set up a BIMSTEC Tourism Information Center in India with a one-time contribution of US\$ 10,000 by each Member State.
- A BIMSTEC Leaders Retreat was held in Goa in India on 16th October 2016. The leaders at the retreat recognized the rich potential for development of tourism and reiterated their keen interest in taking concrete steps to promote intra-BIMSTEC tourism including specialized tourist circuits and eco-tourism. In particular, the Leaders encouraged the development of Buddhist Tourist Circuit & Temple Tourist Circuit within the region.

Accordingly, the BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators was created in 2017 to take forward the leaders vision from the retreat and promote tourism in the region. The First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators held on 07th July 2017 in New Delhi, made several important recommendations which include preparation of a common marketing strategy, creation of a BIMSTEC tourism brand, development of a common website and holding of annual BIMSTEC Travel Marts & Conclaves.

### **Distinguished Participants,**

I would like to draw your kind attention to the fact that while we have institutes, mechanisms and policies in place, the implementation of agreed programs and activities in this sector have been extremely slow.

In this regard, I would like to mention that the BIMSTEC Working Group for Tourism met only once in 2013 in New Delhi. Similarly, the Third BIMSTEC Tourism Ministers' Roundtable Workshop could not be held after its Second Meeting, which was held in 2006. As a result, issues like the BIMSTEC Travel Card, BIMSTEC Visa Exemption Scheme, BIMSTEC Information Center, BIMSTEC Tourism Fund could not be discussed and finalized for implementation. The **Plan of Action for Tourism** was approved in 2006 (which is 14 years back), and now needs to be reviewed and updated.

Likewise, there are some other important issues in this sector that require immediate attention.

We have not been able to tap the full potential of our resources for promotion of tourism despite having rich heritage of nature, culture and historical attractions of the BIMSTEC region.

The role of the Tourism Business Community could not be utilized properly although it is key for operating theme-based circuit tourism in the BIMSTEC region.

### **Distinguished Participants,**

The aim of regional tourism promotion is to enhance contribution of the tourism sector to the economies of the Member States. To achieve this goal, we need the participation and collaboration among the governments, the private sectors, local communities, development partners, as well as the International NGOs and

NGOs. Therefore, I would like to urge the Member States to give due importance to enhance cooperation under this sector.

Moving towards COVID pandemic and its disruptions, you will agree with me that tourism and hospitality industries are the major casualties all over the world. We all know hotels, airlines and other tourism services are shut down as both national and international travels have been restricted. No doubt, it will be a challenge to restore intra-regional tourism before the pandemic subsides. Nevertheless, I hope that the Member States will take care of post-crisis management, caused by the pandemic as well as duly prioritize the implementation of Plan of Action for Tourism promotion in this region.

To conclude, I would like to thank ADB for organizing this timely workshop during this difficult time. We, the Secretariat as well as the Member States, are eagerly looking forward to having a comprehensive tourism development strategy which will help to kick start BIMSTEC regional tourism and contribute towards a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable BIMSTEC region as envisioned by our Leaders.

Moreover, the Secretariat also looks forward to working closely with ADB to further deepen and expand the cooperation under the framework of BIMSTEC.

Finally, I wish all the distinguished participants' and consultants - a fruitful deliberation.

Thank you.

.....