

# **BIMSTEC Secretariat, Dhaka, Bangladesh**

## **Press Release**

### **BIMSTEC Secretary General Indra Mani Pandey's Introductory Visit to Sri Lanka**

Secretary General of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), H.E. Indra Mani Pandey, undertook an official visit to Sri Lanka during the period 08-11 April 2024. This was his first official visit to Sri Lanka since taking charge as Secretary General on 04 January 2024.

During the visit, the Secretary General called on H.E. Ranil Wickremesinghe, President of Sri Lanka, Hon. M.U.M. Ali Sabry, PC., MP., Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, and Hon. Ramesh Pathirana, Minister of Health of Sri Lanka. The Secretary General also held meetings with the Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Aruni Wijewardane; Secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr. Anura Dissanayake; Secretary to the Ministry of Health, Dr. Palitha Maheepala; and the Secretary to the Ministry of Education, Mrs. Thilaka Jayasundara.

During his call on President Wickremesinghe, the Secretary General briefed the President on the state of progress in BIMSTEC since the 5<sup>th</sup> Summit that was held in Colombo in March 2022, and the expectations from the 6<sup>th</sup> Summit that is to be held in Bangkok. President Wickremesinghe reiterated Sri Lanka's commitment to BIMSTEC and shared Sri Lanka's priorities for regional cooperation.

Recalling his participation in the BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Retreat held in Bangkok in July 2023, Foreign Minister Ali Sabry stressed the importance of holding frequent and regular meetings at all levels of BIMSTEC to sustain momentum and ensure BIMSTEC's success so that the people of the Bay of Bengal region are able to reap the benefits of regional cooperation.

The Secretary General's meeting with the Secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr. Anura Dissanayake, was in the context of Sri Lanka being the lead member State in BIMSTEC for Human Resource Development. They held detailed discussion on taking forward the BIMSTEC Human Resource Development agenda including the scheduling of the first meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Human Resource Development (HRD) that will consider the draft BIMSTEC Plan of Action on HRD.

The meeting with the Hon. Minister of Health and the Secretary to the Ministry of Health involved detailed discussions on the way forward on the BIMSTEC Health agenda, in the context of Sri Lanka being the lead member State for cooperation in health in BIMSTEC, including convening of the first meeting of BIMSTEC Health Ministers.

The meeting with the Secretary to the Ministry of Education involved discussions on the setting up of the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Sri Lanka for which the Memorandum of Association was signed during the 5<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit in Colombo in 2022, as well as convening of the first meeting of its Governing Board.

Apart from official meetings, the Secretary General participated in a public interactive event organised by the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute (LKI) on the theme 'Regional Cooperation through BIMSTEC', and in two roundtable sessions organised by the Advocata Institute and the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS). These events enabled the Secretary General to interact with a range of officials, experts, academics, thought leaders, researchers, and students, and listen to their views and ideas on regional cooperation. It also provided the Secretary General an opportunity to brief a wide range of persons on pursuit of regional cooperation through BIMSTEC in Bay of Bengal Region.

The Secretary General's engagements with media in Sri Lanka included an interview with The Sunday Morning newspaper and a TV interview on the programme 'At Hyde Park' on Ada Derana.