



BIMSTEC Newsletter

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Bangladesh-Bhutan-India holds the 1st Meeting of Trilateral JWG on Connectivity and Transit

The 1st Bangladesh-Bhutan-India trilateral meeting on connectivity and transit was held on 19 April 2013 in Dhaka. The Bangladesh delegation was led by Ms. Mashfee Binte Shams, Director General (South Asia), Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Bhutanese delegation was led by His Excellency Dasho Bap Kesang, Ambassador of Bhutan to Bangladesh and the Indian delegation was led by Mr. Virendra Kumar, Director (Works), Ministry of Railways.

The meeting is an important step towards developing sub-regional connectivity, which is expected to enhance future comprehensive cooperation for economic development and prosperity in the sub-region. A draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Group deliberation, proposed by Bangladesh was discussed at the meeting. Further discussion on facilitating sub-regional connectivity and transit will be based on the framework of the ToR. The ToR is expected to be finalized at the next meeting of the Group.

Courtesy: Embassy of Bangladesh, Bangkok

“Curtain Raiser on BIMSTEC” Seminar held in Dagon University, Yangon



In collaboration with Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development (CSIRD) and Institute of Foreign Policy Studies (IFPS), University of Calcutta and Dagon University, Yangon organized a seminar entitled “Curtain

Raiser on BIMSTEC” Seminar on 15 May 2013 at Dagon University, Yangon. Diplomats and researchers from the BIMSTEC member countries, and students and professors from Dagon University attended the seminar. They discussed and exchanged views to implement the future direction of BIMSTEC organization and cooperate among BIMSTEC member countries. The seminar was conducted as a result of Indian Prime Minister His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh’s recent visit to Myanmar, as a first step of collaboration and cooperation between Dagon University of Myanmar and Calcutta University of India.

Courtesy: Embassy of Myanmar, Bangkok

Bangladesh will stand by Sri Lanka - Bangladesh Foreign Secretary tells the President



Bangladesh has reassured its support to Sri Lanka at international fora. This message was conveyed to President Mahinda Rajapaksa by Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Mr. Md. Shahidul Haque at a meeting at Temple Tress on 23 April 2013.

“We stand by our Sri Lankan brothers on the issue of human rights” Mr. Haque told President Rajapaksa. “It’s an internal matter, and we are confident of the leadership. We don’t want to see this brought up (in international fora) at any level.”

Recalling his last visit to Sri Lanka more than five years ago, Secretary Haque said he is

“very impressed and pleasantly surprised by the development that has taken place” since his last visit.

Secretary Haque also briefed President Rajapaksa on the purpose of the current visit, which is to assess ongoing collaborations and explore new sectors of cooperation including the areas of trade and shipping.

Others in the Bangladesh delegation included the High Commissioner of Bangladesh in Colombo Mr. Mohammad Sufiur Rahman, a Joint Secretary of Bangladesh’s Ministry of Shipping Mr. Nasir Arif Mahmud and Director (South Asia) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh Mr. Tareq Md. Ariful Islam.

Deputy Minister of Ports and Highways Nirmala Kothalawala, Secretary to the President Mr. Lalith Weeratunga and Secretary to the Ministry of External Affairs Mr. Karunatilake Amunugama from Sri Lankan side also joined the meeting.

Courtesy: Embassy of Sri Lanka, Bangkok

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka Launch Two JWG's on Trade and Shipping

Two Joint Working Groups on trade and shipping have been set up to explore the potentials for enhanced trade and connectivity between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. This was agreed at the second Foreign Office Consultation between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka led by the respective Foreign Secretaries on 22 April 2013 in Colombo .

At the meeting, both sides agreed to reduce tariffs at a faster rate, remove non-tariff barriers and para-tariff measures, and rationalize sensitive lists under multilateral frameworks like SAFTA. They agreed to commence discussion on

a trade framework, beginning with a short-list of economically meaningful items for greater preferential market access, which could be expanded within an agreed time-frame to form the basis for a possible FTA. Both sides also agreed to accord greater emphasis on enhanced maritime connectivity between Bangladesh and Sri Lankan ports.

Courtesy: Embassy of Bangladesh, Bangkok

Bilateral Meeting between Thailand and Myanmar



On 10 April 2013, Mr. Surapong Tovichakchaikul, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand had a bilateral consultation with Mr. U Wunna Maung Lwin, Foreign Minister of Myanmar at the sidelines of the ASEAN Ministers' Meeting in Bandar Seri Begawan.

Deputy Prime Minister Surapong congratulated Myanmar for the continued success in the ongoing reforms, to which Thailand will lend her full support. He also extended an invitation to the Foreign Minister of Myanmar to pay an official visit to Thailand to celebrate the 65th Anniversary of the Diplomatic Relations between the two countries and expressed hope that the Joint Commission (JC) for bilateral cooperation, which held last in 2002, will take place soon.

The two Foreign Ministers discussed important issues as follows:

1) Progress on Dawei Special Economic Zone: Both sides were pleased to learn that the SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle) will soon be set up and that will lead to the implementation of financial arrangements for the development of the Dawei Project.

2) Problem of Trans-boundary Haze: Deputy Prime Minister Surapong sought Myanmar's cooperation to help monitor and control the haze situation on Myanmar's side of the border. He also stated that Thailand stands

ready to cooperate with Myanmar, especially in technical areas, such as, equipment and training of personnel which Myanmar's Foreign Minister confirmed their willingness to cooperate in finding possible solutions related to the causes of this problem. Both sides agreed to have trilateral consultations between Thailand, Myanmar, and Lao PDR in order to address the problem and to find a possible sustainable solution.

3) Displaced Persons from Myanmar: Deputy Prime Minister Surapong viewed the current situation in Myanmar as conducive to repatriation of these people and their subsequent reintegration in areas of origin. Both ministers also discussed possible cooperation between Thailand, Myanmar and the UNHCR on preparing the necessary groundwork for the repatriation. Myanmar indicated her readiness to receive these displaced persons back to Myanmar when the condition for safe return is met.

4) Situation on Rakhine State and Migration of Rohingyas: The Deputy Prime Minister informed that currently the Thai authorities have taken into custody about 2,000 persons who claimed to be Rohingyas/Muslims from Rakhine State. This number includes approximately 500 women and children who have been in temporary care of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Human Security. An initial finding by the UNHCR suggested that most of these people had lived in Rakhine State. Myanmar's side therefore confirmed its readiness to cooperate with Thailand to verify the identity of these people. As for the situation in Rakhine State, Deputy Prime Minister Surapong expressed Thailand's readiness to assist Myanmar's development efforts in the area. The Foreign Minister of Myanmar stated that Myanmar welcome humanitarian assistance from the international community on bilateral basis.

Courtesy: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand

Bangladesh and India Sign Agreements on Join-Venture Power Project

Three agreements, namely, Power Purchase Agreement, Implementation Agreement and Supplementary Joint Venture Agreement - were signed in Dhaka on 20 April 2013 between Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) and India's National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) for a 1320MW

coal-based power plant in Bangladesh's Rampal, Bagerhat. In January 2013, a Joint Venture Agreement was also signed between BPDB and NTPC with equal equity participation for developing the power project in Bangladesh.

Courtesy: Embassy of Bangladesh, Bangkok

Bangladesh and Bhutan hold the First Foreign Office Consultation

During the official visit of His Excellency Mr. Yeshey Dorji, Foreign Secretary of Bhutan to Bangladesh on 1-3 April 2013, the Foreign Secretaries of Bangladesh and Bhutan held the 1st Foreign Office Consultations on 2 April 2013 under the aegis of the MOU on bilateral cooperation signed between the two governments on 1 April 2013.

At the meeting, the Foreign Secretaries of Bangladesh and Bhutan reviewed the entire range of bilateral relations between the two

countries and noted that the MoU on Foreign Office Consultations would provide a formal mechanism to follow up on the decisions of the high level exchanges and enable them to take stock of the existing state of the relationship, identify areas that needed attention and explore new avenues of cooperation for mutual benefit. The two Foreign Secretaries also discussed Bangladesh's initiative on connectivity in a sub-regional context involving Bangladesh, Bhutan and India.

Courtesy: Embassy of Bangladesh, Bangkok

The First Thailand – Bhutan Annual Bilateral Dialogue



On 12 March 2013, Mr. Narong Sasitorn, Director-General of Department of South Asia, Middle East and African Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand and Mr. Kinga Singye, Director-General of the Department of Bilateral Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bhutan co-chaired the 1st Thailand– Bhutan Annual Bilateral Dialogue at the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, Bangkok. The objectives of this dialogue are (1) to review progress under the Comprehensive Framework Agreement for Cooperation between the Kingdom of Thailand and the Kingdom of Bhutan (2) to strengthen bilateral relations between Thailand and Bhutan in every aspect such as politics, economic, trade, investment, security, culture, tourism. After the meeting, Mr. Vijavat Isarabhakdi, Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hosted the luncheon in honour of Mr. Kinga Singye at Sattabongkot room, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On 13 March 2013, the Ambassador of Bhutan visited the Royal Chitralada Agricultural Projects to observe emphasis on implementing His Majesty the King's "Sufficiency Economy's Project".

Courtesy: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand

Baby Buddha Image Installed in Lumbini, Nepal



Baby Buddha Image installation ceremony and Buddha puja was held in Lumbini, Nepal Sacred Garden on 30 March 2013. Weighing 1100 kg and 3.5 meter high the bronze image of Baby Buddha was unveiled jointly by Hon. Vice Chair Acharya Karma Sangbo Sherpa, Lumbini Development Trust, Hon. Khunying Sudarat, the former Thai Minister and Her Excellency Kanthong Unakul, the Thai Ambassador to Nepal in the presence of representatives of Thailand amid the mass of 800 Thai delegates and pilgrims, LDT officials including Member Secretary Mr. Ajitman Tamang and Project Chief Er. Temba Sherpa, monks and nuns, local people and journalists.

The image installation program included Buddha Puja, candle light ceremony and chanting by Thai monks, nuns and delegates in the Mayadevi complex. The Lumbini Sacred Garden witnessed outstanding beauty and serenity of dazzling light.

Vice Chairman Acharya said that the Baby Buddha image was the symbol of Thai love and respect to Nepal, the holy birth country of Buddha and also icon of friendship for Nepalese people. Mr. Acharya also thanked the Thai government, Thai people and the representatives of Thai Phoung Thai Buddhist Foundation for valuable cooperation in the development of the Lumbini. He further expressed hope for more such cooperation in the days ahead.



Ms. Khunying Sadarata, former Thai Minister and leader of the Foundation expressed her immense pleasure to have the opportunity to contribute in the development and promotion of Lumbini, the holy birthplace of Buddha. She further added that Lumbini is the most sacred pilgrimage site for Thai people and the undertakings were the symbol of their unflinching devotion and faith to the Buddha land. She also committed for more such cooperation in future on behalf of her Foundation and Thai people.



Lumbini, the holy birthplace of Sakyamuni Buddha is gradually witnessing many elegant Buddha images meeting the wish of Buddhist devotees and people world over. Recently installed statue of Baby Buddha adds to the serenity of Lumbini that stands close to the Eternal Peace Flame between the link ponds signifying Lumbini to be the holy birthplace of the Sakyamuni Buddha.

Courtesy: Embassy of Nepal, Bangkok

The 3rd Thai Film Festival in Kathmandu



On 20–22 March 2013, the Royal Thai Embassy in Kathmandu organized the Thai Film Festival 2013 at Nepal Tourism Board. It was the 3rd Thai Film Festival in Nepal after the first two successfully held in 2008 and 2011. The main purpose of organizing the Thai Film Festival is to promote cultural awareness and reveal a fascinating facet of modern Thai culture as well as to depict various aspects of Thai society.

The inauguration ceremony of the Thai Film Festival took place on 20 March 2013, beginning with the reception followed by welcome address by H.E. Mrs. Kanthong Unakul, Ambassador of Thailand to Nepal. After that, the

film 'The Overture' was screened on the same day. 'The Overture' is the award winning musical-drama based on the life story of Thai palace musician Luang Pradit Phairoh (Sorn Silapabanleng), which follows the life of a Thai classical musician from the late 19th century to the 1940s.

The festival was open for public viewing during 21–22 March 2013. Seven films were screened during the festival, which are as follows:



(1) The Overture (2) Bangkok Traffic (Love) Story (3) Ladda Land (4) Hello Stranger (5) Best of Times (6) Phobia 2 and (7) First Love (A Little Thing Called Love). The films werewell-received by the audience.

Courtesy: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand

BIMSTEC Upcoming Activities

Date	Activity	Venue
September 2013	The 3 rd BIMSTEC Summit and related Meetings	Myanmar
19-20 September 2013	BIMSTEC Expert Working Group on Maritime Transport Development, and Interim Workshop on the BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure Logistics Study (BTILS) Updating	Thailand
23-24 September 2013	The 4 th Expert Group Meeting on Agriculture Cooperation	Nepal
8-9 December 2013	BIMSTEC Expert Working Group on Railway Development, and Finalization Workshop on the BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure Logistics Study (BTILS) Updating	Bangladesh