



BIMSTEC

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation



NEWSLETTER

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Editorial



As directed by the BIMSTEC Leaders, the Secretariat is in the process of making the organization stronger, more effective and result oriented. On the Occasion of 21st Anniversary of establishment of BIMSTEC, the Secretariat has re-launched the BIMSTEC e-News letter with the objective to keep the people of the Bay of Bengal region informed of the activities of the organization in that direction. We hope to publish e-News letter more frequently from now, and would also welcome valuable feedback from our readers.

Editor

(Ambassador M. Shahidul Islam
Secretary General of BIMSTEC)

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The Second Meeting of BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs



**BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs with the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh
Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina**

The Second Meeting of National Security Chiefs of BIMSTEC Member States was hosted by Bangladesh in Dhaka on 28 March 2018. Meeting was Chaired by Major General (Rtd.) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, Defence and Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. During the meeting they also called on Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

The Meeting reviewed the progress on the Outcome Document of the First Meeting of BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs held in New Delhi, India on 21 March 2017. The Meeting emphasized the importance of working together and information and data sharing for addressing common security threats, both traditional and non-traditional, in the region.

The Meeting considered the report of the First Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum held in New Delhi, India on 22 September 2017. The Meeting underscored the importance of participation of Think Tanks, Civil Societies etc. in security dialogue and agreed to continue holding of the Track 1.5 Dialogue annually. Bangladesh will host the second Meeting of the Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum in 2018.

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Second BIMSTEC Foundation Lecture

“Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal”



Professor Rohan Samarajiva, PhD

The Second BIMSTEC Foundation Lecture was delivered at The Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, 24 August 2016

Fiber optic cables that snake under the ocean or underground are the sinews of 21st Century economies. The data that flow through them coordinate the global value chains that produce much of the world's wealth. Until

recently, the Bay of Bengal was one of the least cabled regions of the world. Bangladesh was connected to world only by the undersea consortium cable SEA-ME-WE 4 and a few terrestrial microwave links across the border with India. Myanmar was connected only by the aged SEA-ME-WE 3 cable and a few links into Thailand.

Shipping movements as depicted in Figure 1 show that the Bay is lightly traversed. Many passenger and cargo aircraft overfly the Bay, but few actually connect the cities in the littoral states. In many cases, transit via hubs such as Bangkok and Singapore is required.

The present weak state of connectivity appears inadequate to support the goal of BIMSTEC [Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation] which is to weave together the fast-growing economies of the region in ways that will result in greater growth and the creation of conditions for more people to emerge from poverty. The region now has a population of over 1.3 billion people (counting only 50 percent of India's population and 25 percent of China's) and a combined GDP of over USD 4 trillion. It is also home to the largest concentration of poor people in the world.

The current state of connectivity contrasts with that in historical times.

Connectivity in the past

The full record of connections across the Bay of Bengal is lost in the mists of history. Presented here are illustrative vignettes.

There is evidence of many interactions across the Bay between the Pallava Kingdom (275 CE to 897 CE) in Southern India and the Kingdom of Funan, in what is now Cambodia. In 408 or 409 CE the Chinese Scholar Monk Fa Xian (337-422 CE) arrived in Sri Lanka by ship from Tamralipti, near present-day Kolkata and left for China by sea via Java. This suggests the existence of commercial shipping in the Fifth Century.

During the Chola ascendancy (9th to 13th Century), there was much interaction between the Kingdom of Bagan in today's Myanmar and the Lankan Kingdom centered on Polonnaruwa. Beyond their military alliance against the Chola, the kingdoms engaged in economic and cultural exchanges. High-volume, low-value commodities such as rice were traded. Monks traversed the Ayeyarwaddy River and the Bay to restore the monk order in Lanka, returning the favor for the flow of Buddhist ideas from Lanka.

During the peak of Chola power the waters now described as the Bay of Bengal were called the Chola Sea. Sunil Amrith, in his 2013 book *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, states that the term Golfo de Bengala was first used by the Portuguese.

Nagapattinam in present-day Tamil Nadu was a major port in Chola times. It continued to serve as a key commercial port through Dutch times to when the Bay became a British lake, with many of the littoral states coming under

British rule. It served as a departure point for migrants to Singapore, Pinang, Mwalamayne, and Yangon. Visakhapatnam and Coconada were principal ports for people movement to Burma under British rule. Sunil Amrith and Amitav Ghosh, in his *Ibis Trilogy* (2008-15), document the extensive connectivity that existed when the British colonized the region.

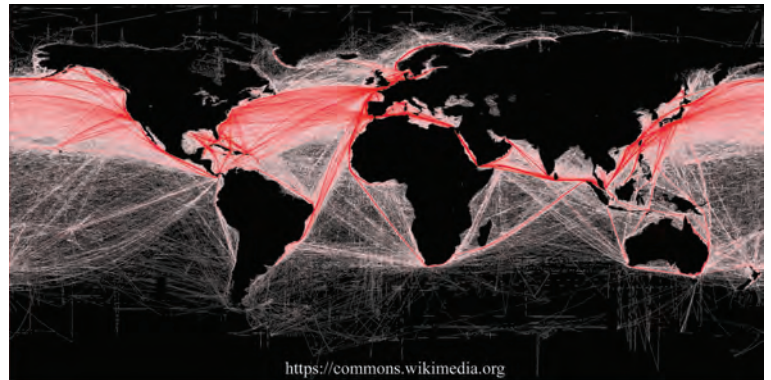


Figure 1: Density of the world's shipping {Source: B.S Halpern T Halic Hengli; D. Groll} Wikimedia Common / CC BY-SA 3.0 ma}

The Second World War and the ensuing wave of decolonization resulted in the decrease of connectivity. Under empire, movement of goods and people were relatively unhindered. Mobility of labor was actively promoted by the British who gave priority to commercial agriculture and resource extraction. The newly independent states were more intent on consolidating national identity. Massive movements of workers and traders from India to littoral states were halted and in some cases reversed. Singapore and Malaysia accommodated the descendants of Indian migrant workers. Sri Lanka took three decades to resolve its problem of “stateless” people; Myanmar is yet to complete the task.

Regional economic integration was a low priority for the newly independent states in the region. Economic issues were excluded in the Final Declaration of the 1955 Asia Africa Conference held in Bandung, finding a place only in the communique. The value of South-South trade was not appreciated. The protectionist elements of the structuralist economics associated with Raul Prebisch crossed the seas from Latin America to Asia, but not the prescriptions for integration of peripheral economies.

As the economies turned inward, connectivity atrophied. The unhappy partition of British India based on the peculiar lines drawn by Sir Cyril Radcliffe in 1947 isolated the North Eastern states of India. The transportation routes developed during the Second World War were closed down. Geography and tensions with the People's Republic of China contributed. But the decisive factor was the withdrawal of Burma from the world economy. As a result, the Bay of Bengal became a backwater of commerce and a laggard in connectivity.

Reconnecting:

Change is in the air as a result of Myanmar choosing to end its isolation, improved relations between Bangladesh and India since 2008, and rapid economic growth in the Northern part of the Bay.

In Kyaukphyu in the Rakhine State of Myanmar, a port has been built with Chinese assistance. The oil and gas pipeline from the coast to the Yunnan Province have also been completed, though plans for a railway and road to carry other goods have been put on hold. Thailand's plans for a port and industrial zone in Dawei in the Tanintharyi Region are making progress. This planned new port on the Andaman Sea will be linked to the agglomeration of industry around Bangkok by new, shorter transportation links.

India's Cabinet has approved funding for the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Project centered on a port to be constructed in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State. This project envisages cargo moving between Kolkata and Sittwe by ship and then via river and rail between Sittwe and locations in the North Eastern states of India. The objective is to connect the "seven sister" states of India's North East with the rest of the country. It will complement similar transit arrangements being worked out across Bangladesh, restoring historical connections disrupted by partition and subsequent events.

The rationale for new ports along the Myanmar coast, except in the case of Sittwe, is connected to the negatives associated with the Malacca and the Lombok-Makassar straits which are now traversed by the many vessels serving Chinese and Japanese ports. It can be illustrated by the history of efforts to build the Kra Canal across the narrowest part of Thailand, the Isthmus. As far back as in 1677, Thailand's King Narai asked a French engineer to report on the possibilities of building a canal connecting Songkla and the Andaman coast. The need to raise ships above the heights achieved in the Panama Canal was perhaps the principal reason the canal did not get built. It is also possible that the threat to the port of Singapore played a role after the British became the dominant power in the region.

The Kra Canal is still under active discussion in Thailand, with a member of the Privy Council promoting it and the Prime Minister opposing it. Unlike in the 19th Century it is no longer necessary to think of the new transportation options such as the Kra Canal and the less dramatic ones in Myanmar. Connectivity is not a zero-sum game in the context of the massive growth being experienced across Asia.

Unlike in the old days, the new connectivity is not limited to ships and land transport. Aviation plays an important role, as does data communication.

New cables are being laid at a fast pace. Hybrid terrestrial and undersea cables such as the Bay of Bengal Gateway which traverses Malaysia and enters to ocean in Pinang is already operational. The high-capacity undersea cable SEA-ME-WE 5 has already been landed in several locations along its path. The branch cables to Kuakata in Bangladesh and Ngwe Saung in Myanmar are expected to be completed by the end of 2016. Chinese telecom operators own shares in this cable as well as the under-construction AAE 1 cable though they do not actually touch Chinese soil. The terrestrial cables connecting Kunming in the Yunnan Province to the landing point have already been constructed.

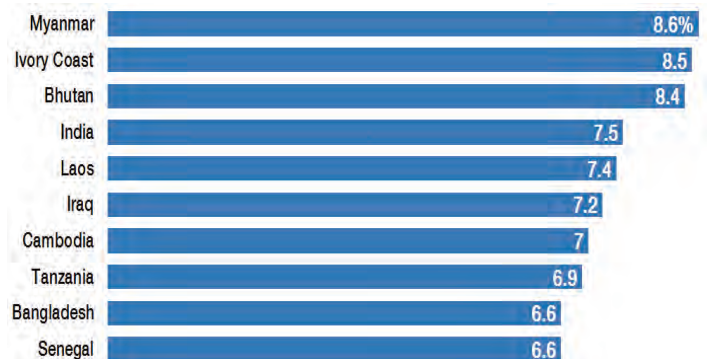
Chinese investments in cables exemplify that country's approach to the Bay of Bengal. Given the need to develop the lagging interior provinces and a strong belief in infrastructure as supportive of rapid economic growth, the Chinese government sees the Bay of Bengal as a critical element of its development efforts. Some have gone so far as to describe Myanmar's coast as being seen as China's west coast. Strategic interest in having option to bypass the "Malacca Trap" is a major factor.

The way ahead

As the economies of the littoral states grow, the need for connectivity will be heightened.

Greater connectivity will make possible increased economic interactions and thereby further accelerate growth. With four of the littoral states among the 10 fastest growing economies in the world as shown in Figure 2 based on IMF projections. If the adjacent states of Cambodia and Laos are included six of the 10 fastest growing economies are in the region.

Figure 2: 10 Fastest Growing Economies



Source: International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook April 2016. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2016/01/pdf/text.pdf>

The considerable investments needed for building the connectivity infrastructure will cause the littoral states to look for assistance. Already China is active in this regard. Geopolitical considerations will drive greater investments by Japan and India, as already evident from Japan's agreement to finance the Matarbari deep sea port in Bangladesh and the financing of the Kaladan project by India, which is actually an Indian domestic infrastructure project running through Myanmar.

If one of two additional factors come into play, connectivity will increase even faster.

The first factor is Myanmar and China reaching agreement on the conditions for the use of Myanmar's territory to permit access to the Bay of Bengal. This will not only assist China, but will also benefit the littoral states through the rapid development of infrastructure serving the Bay.

The second factor is the resolution of political issues in the Bangladesh China India Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor. At a minimum, this will ease the isolation of the North Eastern states of India. At best, this could result in the linking of the terrestrial Silk Road Belt initiative and the Maritime Silk Road through the Bay of Bengal in addition to the economic corridor terminating in the port of Gwadar in Pakistan.

China is already an important actor in efforts to improve connectivity in the region. In the same way that the non-littoral states of Bhutan and Nepal have been given membership in BIMSTEC, some kind of formal association with China would assist in achieving the common objectives of the member states.

A less tangible, but perhaps even more important, action that would help improve connectivity within the Bay of Bengal region is the development of persuasive narratives that will grab the imaginations of policy makers and opinion leaders. When one talks about the European project, there is a strong narrative involving war and peace and Jean Monnet. There are plenty of stories in the Bay of Bengal. We need to unearth them.

Connectivity by itself will not lift the millions of the poor in the region out of poverty. If supplemented by trade agreements and related measures to enable greater participation in global value chains and well-designed domestic economic policies, enhanced connectivity will make the Bay of Bengal region the next success story of the global economy.

Professor Dr. Rohan Samarajiva is founder chair of LIRNEasia. An ICT policy & regulation think tank active across emerging Asia & the Pacific. His most recent co-authored book (2013) titled "Information Lives the Poor," and was published in English, French, Spanish & Burmese. He serves on the editorial boards of five academic journals.

Views expressed do not necessarily reflect The official Position of the BIMSTEC Member States or that of The Secretariat.

Integration for Happiness: a Bhutanese Perspective



Kunzang N. Tshering
Director, Social & Cultural Affairs,
BIMSTEC Secretariat

Happiness is the ultimate goal

Happiness is the ultimate goal, which every human being aspires to achieve in life. The tiny Kingdom of Bhutan with just little over 700,000 inhabitants is situated in the south eastern foothills of the greater Himalayas, squeezed between two Asian giants of China in the north and India in the south. However, small it may be, the country has been independent since the time immemorial. Today, the Kingdom is better known to the outside world as the country of Gross National Happiness (GNH) and also the visitors often refer Bhutan as the last *Shangrila* on earth. For Bhutan, the integration is for happiness and the peoples' happiness is the national priority for sustainable development.

National Integration and Neighborhood Diplomacy

Towards a secured and progressive Bhutan as a place of happiness, the Kingdom followed a self imposed policy of isolation until 1950s, but remained aware of the happenings in the world in general and the geo-political challenges in the region in particular. exemplified by *being the first country in the world to recognize the birth of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in December 1971, as a new sovereign nation-state in the core of the Bay of Bengal region.*

Third King of Bhutan His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck on **6 December 1971**, through a humblest telegraphic message took his courage to recognize the hard-earned independence of our close and friendly neighbor Bangladesh, for which the people of Bhutan are proud of this legacy today.

At that point of time in the history of the world, when half of the world got engaged in the World Wars, the visionary 3rd Monarch of Bhutan took advantage of the peaceful time in isolation and pronounced the policy of the national

integration as a development priority for Bhutan towards achieving the happiness of the people as an ultimate goal in the long run. With this farsighted vision of the King, the Royal Government of Bhutan endeavored on consolidation and integration of the national policies, plans and strategies, initially the social sector policies such as health, education & connectivity, along the lines of the nation's core development of philosophy of GNH.

His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the King of Bhutan simply termed GNH as the development based on values, and guided the nation and the people of Bhutan to apply the GNH values in their daily lives, leading by example.



Their Majesties the King & Queen of Bhutan interacting with the people directly, "Leading by Example" towards integration for happiness.

Way back in 1974, the Fourth Monarch of Bhutan His Majesty the King Jigme Singye Wangchuck in his Coronation Address to the nation emphasized that for Bhutan as a small landlocked country the ***Gross National Happiness (GNH) as far more important than the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)***. However, it took so long for the Bhutanese to brand GNH as its soft-ware product & to make others beyond the borders to understand the concept of happiness as an option for sustainability of the life on earth & to help minimize the exploitation of the scarce natural resources meant to be shared with the generations to come. But the current global trend with more focus on money minting is often viewed as a kind of new robbery wreaking havoc and destructions on our ecology, thereby stealing our future generations of their opportunity to lead a healthy, prosperous and a sustainable life.

Happiness as the 9th UN-MDG

Progressively, in 2011, as proposed by Bhutan, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the happiness as the Ninth UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and also declared ***March 20 of each year to be observed as the International Happiness Day*** by the UN Member States.

Having able to move the international community to agree to adopt the happiness as a MDG and spare One Day out of 365 Days in a year to reflect positively & celebrate the success stories of the individuals, nations and the world at large could be considered as one of the significant contributions made by a small nation like Bhutan towards a greater global integration in recent years.

BIMSTEC & SAARC for Regional Cooperation & Integration

The concept of regional cooperation & integration in South Asia goes back to the pre-independence times. Bhutan realized the importance of the regional integration as a tool for achieving the happiness of the people in the region as a whole. However, a structured efforts for regional cooperation and integration in South Asia came much later with emergence of the sub-regional grouping, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1984 with its First Summit held in Dhaka on 7-8 December 1985 and the of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical & Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in 1997. The First BIMSTEC Summit was convened in Bangkok on 31st July 2004, during which Bhutan was admitted as a member of the Bay of Bengal Economic Community.



Founding Leaders of SAARC

Perhaps, the founding of BIMSTEC gave additional impetus and promise for not only deepening a greater regional cooperation & integration, but also a clearer opportunity to link and engage South Asia with the South East Asia through multi-sectoral and inclusive development approaches, as we enter into the 21st Century. Bhutan is an active member of both the major sub-regional groupings of South Asia today.

Integration for Happiness



The Heads of the Governments of BIMSTEC Member States at GOA Retreat on 16 October 2016.

Reflection on the North-North Cooperation

As per the intangible oral narratives of the living older Bhutanese generation today, Bhutan's history of integration began with hassle-free movement of the people within and across the borders and initially with very a simple format of 'barter trade' among the Bhutanese themselves on regular basis and across the northern neighbor of the then an independent Buddhist State of Tibet. The barter-trading system was limited to meeting of the basic needs and supplements like salt, sugar, essential household items, jewelers, handicrafts and domestic animals, especially the horses and yaks for transportation and the oxen for ploughing the fields. Until 1950s, apart from the huddles of transports & communications, doing business seemed much easier & safer in absence of the hard currency in circulation and with no requirement for business accounting.

However, in absence of the basic of transports & communications facilities between two close neighbors of Bhutan and Tibet even to this day, the movements were not as easy as one could imagine today, while crossing the snow-capped mountains of greater Himalayas on foot without any protective travel gears like today. Whatever said and done, the journeys were border-less and the people in the region enjoyed travelling on business trip or for pilgrimage without any restrictions and requirement to go through the regimes of immigration, customs and border check points harassments. For the Bhutanese, to make a business or cultural trip to Tibet, considered as the roof of the world usually took a couple of weeks to a month to return home safely due to lack of proper mountain connectivity and the infrastructures all way through. For all occasions, the goods and services, including children and disabled people were commuted by caravan of Horses and Yaks, as seen below:



Yak is a hairy version of lowland buffalo, reared as a domestic animal by the nomads and highlanders living above 2500m above the sea level.

Having said this, the children of today, who are the future of tomorrow, for whom the Government & their parents invest a lot in making their future better, should understand that whatever has been made or can be seen today cannot be taken as granted for which their forefathers paid in sweats and bloods in building their future and the nation thus far!

Integration beyond economic gains

From the Bhutanese perspective, the integration towards the northern border had deeper meaning and reasons beyond economic gains. It was in pursuit of the meaningful religious practices and deeper spiritual enrichments, as Bhutan shared a closer cultural ties and commonalities with the Tibetans in terms of religion & faith, language and food habits, which shaped the patterns of thinking for generations and had a stronger influence over management of one's daily affairs. This trend of development influenced the Bhutanese in general to shy away from the much closer neighbors in the south like the northeast Indian States of Assam and West Bengal with whom Bhutan shared a porous border with better connectivity and inland transport facilities. Besides the language & cultural barriers, the Bhutanese were also scared with the high temperatures of the plains and more so with common diseases like malaria, considered to be a deadly killer those days in absence of the basic medical facilities in the border towns. Further, there's no doubt that, the Bhutanese in general cannot stand the heats of the plains, as they are habituated of living in the cold climatic conditions for generations and perhaps under good protection of the mother nature & its pristine environment, which constitutes 72% of Bhutan's land mass at the moment. With this backdrop, the people of Bhutan have learnt to live with mother-nature in harmony!

People to people Contact (P2P)

It is a fact that the movement of the people is of paramount importance not only for the purpose of trading, but also for deepening the multi-sectoral and technical cooperation and integration among the neighborhoods in the long run. For Bhutan as a land locked country, the people to people contact on regular basis and a hassle free movement of the people in the region would be a crucial element in the process of regionalism, as the scope for infrastructural improvement and expansion both by surface and air is very limited, given the land escape and mountain terrain.

But, for a greater regional integration and happiness, smooth transition of the people within the region will be crucial and will always matter the most at all times.

A thought for the day!

While, the older generation of the Bhutanese today, rejoice over the past glory of the free movements in the region, they wonder, why at this stage of development too many complicated rules and regulations have been

created, making the freedom of movement of the common people more and more difficult?

The way forward

With advancement of the economy and technology in the region and the regional mechanisms, such as the BIMSTEC & SAARC in place, the peoples' hopes & aspirations have been raised and obviously expect to see some improvement and changes in the governance & delivery of public services today. Therefore, when the region talks about deepening the regional cooperation & integration, it may be important to include the issues that matters to the people the most. Cross-border management & coordination, the efficiency and effectiveness of the customs and immigration services at the point of transits, the visa regime are few agendas that qualify for a closer review by the Governments of the day and bring them to the limelight for attention of the regional political leaders. Otherwise, it may be wiser to be mindful of talking anything big about the regional integration, if nothing much could be done to facilitate the movement of the people within the region which keeps the economy in progress and our precious life going-on.

In conclusion, the take on for the readers from this article is: ***Integration is beyond the economic gains and the regional integration is for a secured and progressive South Asian Society vis-à-vis the happiness of the people in the region as whole.***

The regional integration through the lens of Bhutan's development concept of GNH, is viewed as one of the effective tools to deepen the people-to-people contact (P2P) at all levels of local, national, regional and beyond and create a space for our people to stretch-out their hands and touch one another, not only to connect the region physically or digitally but also to connect the hearts and minds of the people through regular P2P contact.

May the people of South Asia with its human resource wealth of 1.3 billion, achieve the Gross Regional Happiness (GRH) by 2030, through their wisdoms and collective efforts.

Author's Note:

This article is a one-man's view on the subject of integration seen through his limited knowledge and experiences, but he attempts to remind the readers about what he thinks that matters the most in the process of regional integration, as a Nation State or a Region as whole. It may kindly be noted that the article does not represent any views of either the BIMSTEC or the Royal Government of Bhutan or any other individual.

Secretary General's Activities

Secretary General of BIMSTEC, meets with Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs of India.



The Secretary General of BIMSTEC, H.E. Mr. M Shahidul Islam met H.E. Preeti Saran, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs of India in New Delhi on 26 April 2018. They discussed on the need for early operationalization of BIMSTEC FTA to promote intra-regional trade and economic integration in the Bay of Bengal region.

Secretary General attends the Seminar titled "INTEGRATING BIMSTEC 2018"



The Secretary General of BIMSTEC, H.E. Mr. M Shahidul Islam attended the seminar titled "INTEGRATING BIMSTEC 2018" hosted by Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) in association with the Ministry of External Affairs of India in Gangtok, Sikkim, India on 24 April 2018. He stressed on the need for early operationalization of BIMSTEC FTA to promote intra-regional trade and economic integration in the Bay of Bengal region.

Secretary General Addresses the Conference titled "Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation"



Secretary General of BIMSTEC attends the launching ceremony of FICCI Knowledge Paper on "Reinvigorating BIMSTEC"

The Secretary General of BIMSTEC, H.E. Mr. M Shahidul Islam attended the launching ceremony of FICCI Knowledge Paper on "Reinvigorating BIMSTEC: An Industry Vision for the Next Decade" organized by Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) in New Delhi, India on 26 April 2018. He stressed on the need for early operationalization of BIMSTEC FTA to promote intra-regional trade and economic integration in the Bay of Bengal region.



The Secretary General of BIMSTEC, H.E. Mr. M Shahidul Islam addressed the seminar titled "Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation" organized by Delhi Policy Group (DPG) at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi on 26 April 2018. He stressed on the need for early operationalization of BIMSTEC FTA to promote intra-regional trade and economic integration in the Bay of Bengal region.

Secretary General's Activities

Secretary General of BIMSTEC meets with Dr. Binoda Kumar Mishra, Director, CSIRD



The Secretary General of BIMSTEC, H.E. Mr. M Shahidul Islam had a meeting with Dr. Binoda Kumar Mishra, Director, Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development (CSIRD) in Kolkata, India on 22 April 2018. They discussed on the need for early operationalization of BIMSTEC FTA to promote intra-regional trade and economic integration in the Bay of Bengal region.



The Secretary General met the Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Foreign Affairs and former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Dr. Dipu Moni MP on 25 January 2018.



Conference on "BIMSTEC at its 20: Towards a Bay of Bengal Community"

The Conference titled "BIMSTEC at its 20: Towards a Bay of Bengal Community" was held in BIMSTEC Secretariat, Dhaka on 20 March 2018. The conference was inaugurated by His Excellency Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, MP, Hon'ble Foreign Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Members of Parliament, High Commissioners/Ambassadors and Diplomats from the BIMSTEC Member States at Dhaka, Diplomats from other Embassies/High Commissions at Dhaka, representatives of various international organisations at Dhaka, Government Officials, Business leaders, Members of various Think Tanks, representatives of media, and other dignitaries from BIMSTEC Member



A US-delegation led by Mr. Daniel Rosenblum, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, US Department of State met the Secretary General at the Secretariat on 29 January 2018

Secretary General's Activities



A delegation led by Ms. MURAYAMA Mayumi, Director General (Research), Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO) met the Secretary General at the Secretariat on 31 January 2018



The Secretary General paid tribute to the Shrine of the father of Nations Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Tungipara, Gopalganj on 12 December 2017



Mr. William Sparks, Project Director of USAID Feed the Future Asia Innovative Farmers Project Winrock International, Thailand calls on the Secretary General at his office on 22 January 2018.

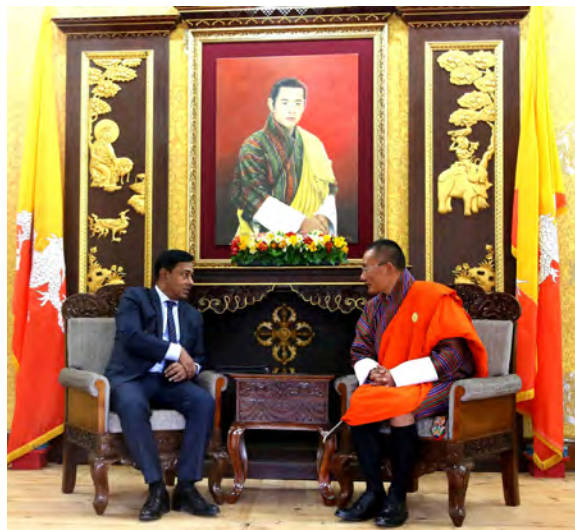


The Secretary General met the Hon'ble Minister for Cultural Affairs of the Government of Bangladesh H.E. Mr. Asaduzzaman Noor on 03 December 2017 and discussed cultural cooperation among BIMSTEC Member States.

Secretary General's Activities



His Excellency Mr. Lwin Oo, Ambassador-designate of Myanmar to Bangladesh met the Secretary General at the Secretariat on 30 November 2017



H.E. Ambassador M. Shahidul Islam, Secretary General of BIMSTEC called on the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bhutan H.E. Lyonchhen Tshering Tobgay in Thimphu on 30 October 2017, during his Introductory Visit to the Kingdom of Bhutan, upon joining BIMSTEC Secretariat in September 2017.



His Excellency Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, MP, Hon'ble Foreign Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh receives The Secretary General at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dhaka on 08 October 2017.



His Excellency Ambassador M Shahidul Islam, Secretary General of BIMSTEC called on the Hon'ble External Minister of India Her Excellency Sushma Swaraj in Dhaka on 22 October 2017.

RECENT EVENTS

Fifth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursor Chemicals



Fifth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursor Chemicals was held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 23 May 2018. Delegates from all the BIMSTEC Member States, i.e., Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand attended the Meeting.

The Meeting reviewed the progress made since the Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursor Chemicals held in Yangon, Myanmar on 12 September 2016.

The Meeting discussed the possible association of BIMSTEC with SARICC (South Asian Regional Intelligence and Coordination Centre on Transnational Organized Crime) being commissioned by UNODC and the Member States and future cooperation based on approved Terms of Reference.

BIMSTEC Conference on Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Genetic Resources



The BIMSTEC Conference on Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Genetic Resources was held on 21-22 May 2018 in Bangkok at the invitation of the Government of Thailand.

The conference was organized with the objective to exchange knowledge and experiences and to update the current situation on the protection of Genetic Resources (GR) & associated Traditional Medicine Knowledge (TMK), as well as to discuss the challenging issues on the development of biodiversity and related databases in the region, besides exploring the possibility of collaboration on GR & TMK with the relevant regional and international agencies, such as WIPO and WHO. Mr. Kunzang N. Tshering, Director in-charge of Public Health Sector in the BIMSTEC Secretariat attended the event.

The Conference agreed that Thailand will prepare the Final Concept Paper on the Protection of Genetic resources (GR) Associated with Traditional Medicine Knowledge (TMK) and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) for the BIMSTEC and submit the same to the Secretariat as soon as possible for concurrence of the BIMSTEC Member States and to be implemented by the line agencies of the respective Member Countries.

RECENT EVENTS

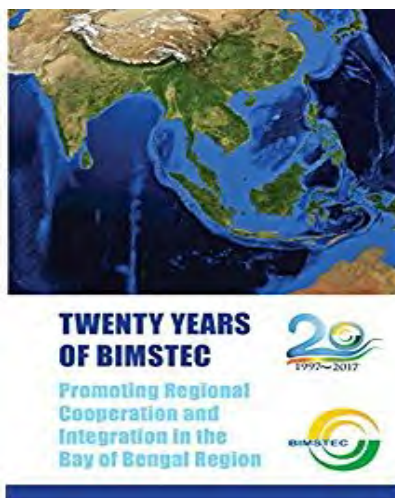
The First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Working Group on Customs Cooperation



The First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Working Group on Customs Cooperation was held in New Delhi, India on 10-11 May 2018. Delegates from all the BIMSTEC Member States, i.e., Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand attended the Meeting.

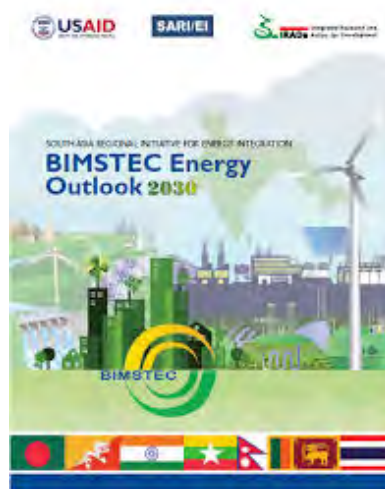
The Meeting reviewed the progress in matters of BIMSTEC customs cooperation and finalized the draft text of the Agreement on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in Customs Matters for BIMSTEC Free Trade Area for submission to the 21st Meeting of the BIMSTEC Trade Negotiating Committee.

Publications on BIMSTEC



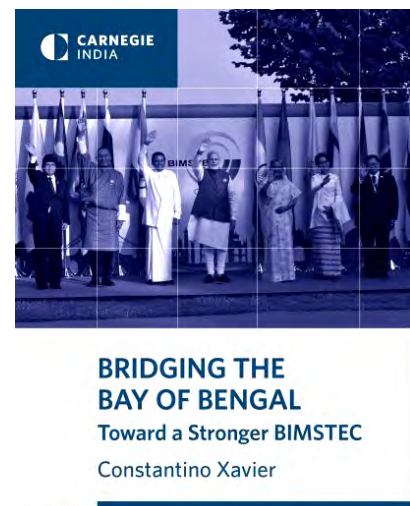
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March 2018



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December 2017



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February 2018

PAST BIMSTEC EVENTS AT A GLANCE

2017

- ✓ Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials on Energy
Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. 11-12 January 2017
- ✓ Seventh Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on the
Establishment of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat
Kathmandu, Nepal. 05 February 2017
- ✓ Second Preparatory Meeting to the Seventeenth BIMSTEC
Senior Officials' Meeting Kathmandu, Nepal. 06 February 2017
- ✓ Seventeenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting
Kathmandu, Nepal. 07 February 2017
- ✓ Eighth BIMSTEC Roundtable Meeting
BIMSTEC Secretariat, Dhaka Bangladesh. 06 March 2017
- ✓ Ninth BIMSTEC Roundtable Meeting
BIMSTEC Secretariat, Dhaka Bangladesh. 14 March 2017
- ✓ First Annual Meeting of the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs
New Delhi, India. 21 March 2017
- ✓ Seventh Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Legal and Law
Enforcement Issues Yangon, Myanmar. 22-23 March 2017
- ✓ Tenth BIMSTEC Roundtable Meeting
BIMSTEC Secretariat, Dhaka Bangladesh. 19 April 2017
- ✓ Third Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks
Dhaka, Bangladesh. 22-23 April 2017
- ✓ International Conference on "Strengthening Cultural Linkages in the
Bay of Bengal Region" Bangkok Thailand. 27-28 May 2017
- ✓ Workshop on International Cooperation Focused on "Asset Recovery"
for BIMSTEC Member States Dhaka, Bangladesh. 30 May-01 June 2017
- ✓ First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators
New Delhi, India. 07 July 2017
- ✓ BIMSTEC Film Festival
BIMSTEC Secretariat, Dhaka Bangladesh. 22-26 July 2017
- ✓ Preparatory Meeting to the First BIMSTEC Annual
Disaster Management Exercise
New Delhi, India 08-09 August 2017
- ✓ Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials'
Meeting Kathmandu, Nepal. 10 August 2017
- ✓ Fifteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting and its
preceding Meeting Kathmandu, Nepal. 11 August 2017
- ✓ BIMSTEC Track 1.5 Security Dialogue Forum
New Delhi, India. 22 September 2017
- ✓ First Annual BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise
New Delhi, India. 10-13 October 2017
- ✓ First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional
Medicine (BTFTM) New Delhi, India. 24-25 October 2017
- ✓ BIMSTEC Expert Group Meeting on Poverty Alleviation
Kathmandu Nepal. 01 November 2017
- ✓ Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity
Working Group Bangkok, Thailand. 13-14 November 2017
- ✓ Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on the
Establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility
Colombo, Sri Lanka. 21-22 November 2017
- ✓ First Working Group Meeting to discuss and finalise the
Draft Text of the Coastal Shipping Agreement among
BIMSTEC Member States New Delhi, India 27-28 November 2017
- ✓ Workshop on Promotion of Agriculture Trade and Investment
among BIMSTEC Member States
Thimphu, Bhutan 29-30 November 2017
- ✓ Sixth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Agricultural
Cooperation Chiang Rai, Thailand. 12-16 December 2017
- ✓ Third Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation
Colombo, Sri Lanka. 19-20 December 2017

PAST BIMSTEC EVENTS AT A GLANCE

2018

- ✓ 15th Healthcare Executive Management Development Programme (HX MDP) AIIMS India, 18-24 February 2018
- ✓ International Training Workshop on Inland Aquaculture & Small-scale Inland Aquaculture Promotion for Fisheries Officers/Biologists from the BIMSTEC/IOA Member Countries Bangkok, Thailand 04-17 March
- ✓ Conference on "BIMSTEC at its 20: Towards a Bay of Bengal Community" BIMSTEC Secretariat, Dhaka, Bangladesh 20 March 2018
- ✓ Capacity Building for Voter Registration for Election Officials' from BIMSTEC Member Countries to be conducted by Election Commission of India (ECI) New Delhi, India 26-30 March 2018
- ✓ 2nd Meeting of BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs Dhaka, Bangladesh 28 March 2018
- ✓ Special Meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on the Establishment of BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat Dhaka, Bangladesh 05 April 2018
- ✓ First Working Group Meeting to negotiate the Draft Text of the Motor Vehicles Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger and Cargo Vehicular Traffic between and among BIMSTEC Member States New Delhi, India 09-10 April 2018
- ✓ First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Working Group on Customs Cooperation New Delhi, India 10-11 May 2018
- ✓ Fifth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and precursor Chemicals Kathmandu, Nepal 23 May 2018



BIMSTEC is an intergovernmental regional organization comprising seven Member States lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity. This organization came into being on 6 June 1997 in Bangkok, Thailand. It's membership includes five from South Asia, i.e., Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka and two from Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand. The Secretariat is located in Dhaka, Bangladesh. © BIMSTEC Secretariat. 2018