

Editorial

Welcome to the July-September 2020 edition of the BIMSTEC Newsletter. The pandemic continues to destruct and disrupt the lives and livelihood of everyone on the planet and a new normal of doing things has emerged. At the Secretariat while we have not been able to get back to our full implementation of the planned activities, we are happy to report that important meetings like the 21st SOM and the 4th BPWC Meeting have been able to be held to discuss and decide on crucial matters. Although participants have expressed that they missed the camaraderie and the personal connections offered by in-person meetings, nonetheless, the virtual meetings were able to be held successfully.

The month of September is also significant in that we bade goodbye to Ambassador M Shahidul Islam, the 2nd Secretary General of BIMSTEC. The Secretariat will miss Ambassador Islam who leaves behind a strong legacy.

During his three-year tenure, Ambassador Islam led the organization to a higher level by promoting visibility of the BIMSTEC as mandated by the leaders of BIMSTEC. He has rendered his commendable service on the successful holding of the 4th BIMSTEC Summit and preparatory works for convening the 5th BIMSTEC Summit. The Secretariat highly appreciates his valuable efforts on the norm setting and institution building of the BIMSTEC process particularly steps taken for the adoption of the BIMSTEC Charter at the upcoming Summit.



Han Thein Kyaw

Officer-in-Charge of the Secretariat

21st BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) Colombo, Sri Lanka (virtual), 2nd September 2020



The 21st BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka virtually on 2nd September 2020. It was attended by the Foreign Secretaries of all the Member States. Before the start of the meeting the participants observed a one minute silence to pay respects to the former President of the Republic of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee who passed away on 31st August 2020. On behalf of the 21st SOM, H.E. Admiral Prof. Jayanath Colombage, Foreign Secretary of Sri Lanka conveyed condolence to the Government and the people of India on the sad passing away of the great politician.

The Meeting endorsed the finalized text of the BIMSTEC Charter that would be proposed for approval of the Seventeenth Ministerial Meeting. It was also decided that the following legal instruments would be signed at the Fifth BIMSTEC Summit:

1. BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters
2. Memorandum of Association (MoA) on the Establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility (TTF) in Colombo, Sri Lanka
3. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Mutual Cooperation between Diplomatic Academies/Training Institutions of BIMSTEC Member States

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The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the BIMSTEC Secretariat and the Asian Development Bank to enlist greater project support in the region was also approved by the Meeting.

The 21st BIMSTEC SOM welcomed the nomination of Mr. Tenzin Lekphell from Bhutan for the position of the next Secretary General of BIMSTEC. The Meeting also thanked the outgoing Secretary General, Ambassador M Shahidul Islam for his dynamic leadership and remarkable contributions to the organization during his tenure.

4th BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee Meeting Colombo, Sri Lanka (virtual), 31st August 2020



The 21st BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting was preceded by the 4th BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPWC) Meeting held virtually in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 31st August 2020. Delegates from all the Member States attended the meeting. Among other issues, the Meeting discussed the proposed organogram as well as budget and administrative matters of the Secretariat. Due to the pandemic situation the Meeting took note of the difficulties of having physical meetings and recommended that most of the meetings could be held virtually until such times when travel is possible.

Visit to Bangabandhu's Mausoleum at Tungipara, 22nd August 2020



The Secretary General, Ambassador M Shahidul Islam led a delegation of officials from the BIMSTEC Secretariat to pay homage to the Mausoleum of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation of Bangladesh. A floral wreath was laid at Bangabandhu's Mausoleum at Tungipara, Gopalganj and prayers offered for eternal peace of the departed soul of the great leader and peace and prosperity of Bangladesh. The Secretary General was accompanied by his wife madame Jesmeen Islam, BIMSTEC Directors and other officials of the Secretariat. The Secretary General also signed the visitors' book kept at the Mausoleum.

Bidding Farewell to the Secretary General of BIMSTEC Ambassador M Shahidul Islam



On 20 September 2020, the officials of the BIMSTEC Secretariat organized a program to bid farewell to the Secretary General Ambassador M Shahidul Islam from Bangladesh upon completion of his successful tenure of three years at the BIMSTEC Secretariat from 21 September 2017 to 20 September 2020.

Mr. Md. Shamsul Haque, Additional Foreign Secretary (SAARC and BIMSTEC) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh was present as the Special Guest in the program. The spouse of the Secretary General Madame Jesmeen Islam also attended the farewell program.

The Additional Foreign Secretary Mr. Md. Shamsul Haque appreciated the remarkable contributions made by Ambassador Islam during his tenure as the Secretary General of BIMSTEC. He also acknowledged the diligent nature of Ambassador Islam and thanked the outgoing Secretary General for doing an excellent job in creating a new momentum in the BIMSTEC Forum particularly in the norm setting and institution building of the BIMSTEC process.



The Directors and officials of the BIMSTEC Secretariat expressed their sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the Secretary General Ambassador M Shahidul Islam for his stewardship of this regional organisation BIMSTEC for the last three years. They highlighted Ambassador Islam's extraordinary leadership qualities and thanked Secretary General for his kind guidance in the performance of their duties and responsibilities. The Officials also added that the outgoing Secretary General was going to leave behind a vital legacy at the organisation which would inspire as well as guide them in the coming days.

They highlighted the achievements made by the Secretary General Ambassador Islam during his tenure in further advancing the BIMSTEC process, particularly in finalizing the BIMSTEC Charter among others as well as in completing preparatory works for convening of the Fifth BIMSTEC Summit and Seventeenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting.

In his farewell remarks, the Secretary General Ambassador M Shahidul Islam thanked the Directors and other officials of the BIMSTEC Secretariat for their assistance and support in fulfilling his endeavours to make the organization more vibrant in his three year tenure. He also appreciated the hard work and sincerity of the officials of the BIMSTEC Secretariat to enhance the visibility of BIMSTEC during his tenure as the Secretary General of BIMSTEC.

At the program, the officials of the BIMSTEC Secretariat also presented a token of memento to Ambassador M Shahidul Islam and his spouse. The program was followed by a farewell lunch.



Ambassador M Shahidul Islam was invited by UNESCAP, New Delhi to speak at the **Virtual High-Level Policy Dialogue on “COVID-19 and South Asia: Socio-Economic Impacts, National Strategies and Sub-regional Cooperation for Building Back Better”** held on 9 July 2020. In his remarks Ambassador Islam talked of the pandemic not only being a health crisis but an economic and social one as well and highlighted the need for immediate regional action to mitigate the adverse economic and social impacts. He also stressed the need to promote the use of digital technology.



Ambassador M Shahidul Islam, Secretary General of BIMSTEC visited the Germplasm Centre, Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), Mymensingh on 10 September 2020 to see the facilities of the Centre and exchange views on desirability of Germplasm and material transfer agreement for BIMSTEC Member States.



H.E. Mrs. Rensje Teerink, Ambassador & the Head of Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh met the Secretary General of BIMSTEC, Ambassador M. Shahidul Islam on 14 September 2020 at the BIMSTEC Secretariat. They discussed about the possible cooperation between BIMSTEC and European Union.



The Secretary General Ambassador M Shahidul Islam was invited by the Independent University of Bangladesh as a special guest to speak at the **Inception Webinar on 'Likely geo-political, geo-strategic and geo-economic scenario in the Bay of Bengal region in the post COVID world – implications and Bangladesh's response to challenges'** held on 15 September 2020. In his special remarks, Ambassador Islam highlighted the areas of collaboration that BIMSTEC was working on to strengthen both physical as well as economic connectivity in the region as well as to mitigate the disasters posed by climate change through sharing of information, resources and expertise. He also stressed the importance of maintaining peace and security in the region through cooperation. He commended Bangladesh for taking a proactive role in the effort towards ensuring the achievement of the vision of BIMSTEC.



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