



BIMSTEC

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



April-June 2021 Issue

NEWSLETTER

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Editorial



A warm welcome to all our readers to the April-June edition of the BIMSTEC Newsletter. We are glad to report that the Seventeenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was successfully held on 1st April 2021 with the participation of all our Member States. The Meeting finalized many of the pending decisions. We now look forward to the Fifth BIMSTEC Summit. However, with the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic hitting most of our Member States very hard, it has been a difficult time for the BIMSTEC region. We do hope to see some light at the end of the tunnel with our Member States fighting back hard against this invisible enemy and hope that the Summit can happen sometime later this year.

As a consequence of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, many of the scheduled virtual meetings had to be postponed due to some of the Member States not being able to participate. However, we hope to have these meetings on track soon so that we can move forward on implementing the planned activities.

We are grateful to our Leaders for their messages of commitment to the BIMSTEC process as we all navigate these difficult times. We remain inspired and motivated to strive our best. The BIMSTEC Secretariat would like to wish all our readers well and to stay safe by following proper precautions against Covid-19.

Tenzin Lekphell
Secretary General of BIMSTEC

Messages from the BIMSTEC Leaders on the occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021

PRIME MINISTER, GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

23 Jaistha 1428
06 June 2021



MESSAGE

I am very delighted to extend my warm felicitations to the Governments and the Peoples of the Member States of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) on the joyous occasion of the 24th BIMSTEC Day. I also take this opportunity to convey my greetings to the Secretary-General of BIMSTEC and the officials of the BIMSTEC Secretariat.

Bangladesh joined the BIMSTEC Forum during Awami League-led Government in 1997 in the spirit of realization of the dream of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to achieve collective economic and social progress for the neighboring countries through building a stronger cooperation with them. The Father of the Nation's legacy of Regional Cooperation has since been one of the Foreign Policy priorities of Bangladesh. As we have been celebrating the Birth Centenary of the Father of the Nation and the 50th anniversary of our Independence this year, it is my profound pleasure to reiterate our commitment to the BIMSTEC process for the uplift of the standards of lives of all our Peoples in the Bay of Bengal region.

BIMSTEC process achieved some remarkable progress during the last 24 years of its existence. I am glad to note that we have been able to build some of the important institutional and legal frameworks during this period. Now we need to work faster to turn BIMSTEC into a result-oriented organization to achieve our collective goals. Bangladesh as a founding member and the host country of the BIMSTEC Secretariat will do everything possible to strengthen the BIMSTEC process. We thank all members of BIMSTEC for their concerted support and continuous engagements.

It is my firm conviction that the BIMSTEC process will intensify further with the holding of the 5th BIMSTEC Summit soon. I hope that the 5th BIMSTEC Summit will generate new impetus in stepping forward the progress we already made in various important sectors of cooperation including trade and investment, connectivity, agriculture and energy, public health, and technology sectors. As we have been passing through an unprecedented crisis of prolonged COVID-19 Pandemic, I would urge upon the esteemed Member States to leverage the BIMSTEC platform to combat the multi-prong challenges and devastating impact of COVID-19 during the Post-Covid-19 Era. We may exploit this platform to forge cooperation especially in the fields of food security, disaster management, and poverty alleviation through sharing our knowledge and expertise.

On this very auspicious occasion, I wish BIMSTEC Forum all success in its future endeavors.

**Long Live the BIMSTEC Spirit.
Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu.**

Sheikh Hasina

Messages from the BIMSTEC Leaders on the occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021



PRIME MINISTER

Royal Government of Bhutan
June 06, 2021

MESSAGE

On the occasion of the founding day of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), I am pleased to convey the warm greetings of His Majesty The King, Her Majesty The Queen and the people of Bhutan to the peoples and Governments of the Member States of BIMSTEC.

BIMSTEC was founded in 1997 with the vision to foster and enhance mutually beneficial cooperation in the Bay of Bengal region. We have come a long way since its inception. Over the years, our engagements in mutually beneficial initiatives and activities have deepened and continue to grow. I am happy that the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was successfully held earlier this year, and I look forward to participating in the BIMSTEC Summit.

The whole world, particularly our region, is living through unprecedented times. For the past one and half years, we have confronted the multiple challenges posed by COVID-19. I am pleased to share that under the visionary and compassionate leadership of His Majesty The King, we, in Bhutan, have been quite successful in dealing with the multiple impacts of the pandemic. Our efforts have been further reinforced by the solidarity and support extended by our friends in the region. I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to Member States for the solidarity and exemplary support extended during such difficult times. I am optimistic that this spirit of friendship and cooperation will continue during this challenging time and beyond.

On this special day, with prayers and best wishes from Bhutan to all BIMSTEC Member States, I would like to once again reaffirm the steadfast commitment of the Royal Government of Bhutan to BIMSTEC.

Tashi Delek and Stay safe!

(Dr Lotay Tshering)



Messages from the BIMSTEC Leaders on the occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021



PRIME MINISTER
Republic of India

MESSAGE

It gives me great pleasure to extend warm greetings and facilitations to fellow citizens of BIMSTEC on the occasion of the 24th BIMSTEC Day.

The people of BIMSTEC are bound by shared history and age old cultural and civilizational linkages. As a manifestation of our collective will, BIMSTEC has emerged as a promising regional grouping to fulfill the common aspirations of its people and serve the shared interests of the Member States.

I am happy to note that regional cooperation under BIMSTEC framework has intensified substantially in the recent years. Progress has been made on several fronts including the finalization of the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity and the text of the BIMSTEC Charter. I had the privilege of addressing the young entrepreneurs from the region at the BIMSTEC Start Up Conclave in January.

We mark the BIMSTEC Day amidst a difficult phase of the COVID pandemic. It is an unprecedented challenge and a testing time for all of us. We need to continue to work together in the fight against the pandemic and in collectively overcoming its consequences.

I commend Sri Lanka, the current Chair of BIMSTEC, for providing able leadership to BIMSTEC during this time. I welcome the new Secretary General of BIMSTEC, H.E. Mr. Tenzin Lekphell from Bhutan, and appreciate the important role being played by the BIMSTEC Secretariat in the effective coordination of the organization's activities.

I am confident that BIMSTEC will continue to grow and scale new heights of cooperation in our common pursuit of building a secure, peaceful and prosperous Bay of Bengal region.

New Delhi
May 31, 2021

(Narendra Modi)

Messages from the BIMSTEC Leaders on the occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021



**Chairman
State Administration Council
Republic of the Union of Myanmar**

MESSAGE

Today marks the 24th Anniversary of the establishment of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), a regional grouping of seven countries with a common aspiration to build “a Peaceful, Prosperous and Sustainable Bay of Bengal Region” through collective efforts and meaningful cooperation. On this auspicious day, I have the pleasure to extend my warmest felicitations and best wishes to the Governments and the peoples of BIMSTEC Member States.

Throughout its 24-year journey, BIMSTEC has made significant progress in fulfilling aims and purposes enshrined in the 1997 Bangkok Declaration. BIMSTEC is now about to embark on a new era with the Charter of BIMSTEC which is to be signed at the upcoming Summit. I am strongly confident that the Charter will serve as not only a solid foundation for rule-based cooperation, but also confer BIMSTEC a legal personality.

Presently, the COVID-19 pandemic is still posing as a daunting threat to health, economy and livelihood of the peoples around the world, including our region. I am confident that, with our collective efforts, we will be able to defeat these challenges and rebuild our regional economy in the near future.

As Myanmar views BIMSTEC as a key platform for peace, prosperity and sustainability in the Bay of Bengal region, we are committed to active cooperation in response to new and emerging challenges, together with other Member States in a spirit of friendship, solidarity, mutual respect and mutual understanding.

I wish BIMSTEC a stronger, more effective and resilient cooperation framework in the years to come.

Nay Pyi Taw, 6 June 2021


Senior General Min Aung Hlaing

Messages from the BIMSTEC Leaders on the occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021



The Prime Minister of Nepal

MESSAGE

On the occasion of the 24th anniversary of the establishment of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), on behalf of the people and Government of Nepal as well as on my own, I wish to extend warm greetings and felicitations to the peoples and fellow Governments of BIMSTEC Member States.

Since last year, global community has been grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. Current trying time demands us to pool our strengths, stand in solidarity with each other and build better resilience across the region. The raging second wave of the COVID transmission has exposed our vulnerability. We are racing against time to ensure the required supply of personal protective equipment, therapeutic drugs and vaccines, arrange respirators, oxygen, ventilators and ICU beds, and provide critical care to the patients.

I believe that vaccination is a key part of the solution to such a pandemic. Our region should muster further efforts in ensuring timely and affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

Collaboration and cooperation in responding to the global health crisis is also a contribution towards the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. This is crucial, in particular, for the realization of the overarching goal of eradicating poverty and ensuring basic social protection for our peoples.

The pandemic has also caused widespread social impacts. Women, children, elderly people, and those poor and marginalized ones are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Education has come to a standstill in the midst of the pandemic. Renewed attention is needed to assure that the future of millions of students would not be compromised.

The best way we can push through such a difficult moment in history is through collective resolve to move ahead. Sharing of experiences in strengthening our health systems and accelerating cooperation in trade and technology, science and innovation, have become vitally important areas of regional and global cooperation.

Home to 22 percent of the global population, BIMSTEC is a region with huge potentials for meaningful cooperation and strengthened partnership. As envisioned by the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit Declaration adopted in Kathmandu in August 2018, Nepal is committed to working in concert 'towards a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Bay of Bengal region'.

I hope that the upcoming BIMSTEC Summit will be a milestone for institutional strengthening and intensification of multi-sectoral cooperation among member states, including through the adoption of BIMSTEC Charter.

May the BIMSTEC Day inspire us to further deepen our solidarity, collaboration and cooperation for peace, prosperity and wellbeing of our peoples.

K P Sharma Oli

Kathmandu, 1 June 2021

Messages from the BIMSTEC Leaders on the occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021



President of Sri Lanka

MESSAGE

I consider it a great privilege to convey greetings and best wishes of the Government and the people of Sri Lanka on the happy occasion of the 24th Anniversary of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

We take great pride to be one of the founder members of this prestigious initiative way back in 1997.

As the current Chair of BIMSTEC, Sri Lanka convened eight core BIMSTEC Meetings including the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting during which Member States collectively finalized the BIMSTEC Charter, Rationalization of Sectors and Sub Sectors of BIMSTEC, MoU on Mutual Cooperation between Diplomatic Academies/Training Institutions of BIMSTEC Member States, with a view to adopt at the 5th BIMSTEC Summit. The Secretariat has commendably supported and facilitated the process under the BIMSTEC framework to achieve this outcome. I wish to take this opportunity to convey that, Sri Lanka is considering hosting the 5th BIMSTEC Summit in the latter part of the year depending on the mitigation of the spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic and ease of travel restrictions in Member States.

Although, BIMSTEC represents 22% of the world populations, it only contributes 4% of the World GDP. Therefore, I strongly encourage Member States to continue to deepen cooperation to address the region's challenges and to seize the many opportunities for shared progress.

I reassure that Sri Lanka would remain committed to all BIMSTEC initiatives as we did in the past.

Let all Member States of BIMSTEC harmoniously work towards achieving shared prosperity and peace for our peoples.

12 May, 2021



Gotabaya Rajapaksa

Messages from the BIMSTEC Leaders on the occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021



**Prime Minister
of the Kingdom of Thailand**

MESSAGE

On behalf of the Royal Thai Government and people of the Kingdom of Thailand, I am pleased to extend my warmest congratulations to the BIMSTEC Member States on the auspicious occasion of the 24th Anniversary of BIMSTEC.

Over the years, BIMSTEC has proven to be a "bridge of friendship," connecting the peoples of South and Southeast Asia. Though divided by geography, we are joined together by cultural heritage, mutual goodwill, and the shared ambition of security and prosperity. Our small community of nations has always worked closely together towards mutual prosperity through promoting trade and economic cooperation, facilitating business, enhancing people-to-people contacts, and furthering connectivity and security. Together we have accomplished the strengthening of BIMSTEC institutions, including the prioritisation of the seven sectors of cooperation, and the Master Plan on Transport Connectivity. In the future, I firmly believe that BIMSTEC will accomplish realizing these institutions into concrete cooperation, which will further empower us to tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

With this faith in the capacity and potential of BIMSTEC, Thailand pledges our utmost support to furthering BIMSTEC cooperation in both physical connectivity and enhancing an enabling environment for our peoples. We have come far in twenty four years, and I am certain that, with the spirit of friendship and solidarity, we will continue to maximize our potential in the decades to come.

Since its inception, BIMSTEC has represented the Bay of Bengal's collective hope of growth, resilience, openness and interconnectedness. I believe that the journey that lies ahead for BIMSTEC will continue to embody the spirit of its foundation, and lead this region to a prosperous future.

Prayut Chan-o-cha
**Gener. Prayut Chan-o-cha (Ret.)
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand**



Messages from the Foreign Ministers of the Member States on the occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021



FOREIGN MINISTER



GOVERNMENT OF THE
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
DHAKA

06 June, 2021

MESSAGE

It is with immense pleasure; I would convey my sincere felicitations to the Governments and the peoples of the Member States of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) on the auspicious of the 24th BIMSTEC Day on 06 June 2021. I would also take this opportunity to extend my greetings to the Secretary General of BIMSTEC and the officials of the BIMSTEC Secretariat.

Bangladesh as the founding member of the BIMSTEC Forum and the host country of the Secretariat attaches high importance to the BIMSTEC process as a Regional Organization for collective economic and social progress of the Bay of Bengal Region. We are deeply committed to strengthening the areas of cooperation and expediting our endeavours in all avenues to bring out result for the benefit of our peoples. I fondly recollect my fruitful engagement with my counterparts at the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting held virtually on 1st April this year and our consensus on expediting the implementation of BIMSTEC Free Trade Area, adoption of BIMSTEC Master Plan to make the Multi-mode Transport Connectivity Programme effective with conclusion of all connectivity related legal documents, forging stronger cooperation in Energy Sector, Public Health Sector, strengthening BIMSTEC Agriculture Cooperation, Technology and ICT Cooperation, Non-traditional Security Cooperation, etc. on utmost priority basis to turn the BIMSTEC Forum into a result oriented Regional Organization. We now look forward to having the opportunity of interactions of our Leaders at the 5th BIMSTEC Summit in Colombo soon. I strongly believe the BIMSTEC process will get a boost through the meaningful engagements and directives of our Leaders in the coming days.

The prolonging of the Covid 19 Pandemic posed multiple challenges to the entire global community. This pandemic has taught us a lesson that we all have to walk together in partnership for our well being. Therefore, we must make BIMSTEC Forum more relevant and exploit the synergies of our engagements in addressing the long-term impacts during the post Covid 19 era through proactive collaboration and partnership.

On this joyous occasion, I would reiterate my sincere wishes for all success of the BIMSTEC process in its future ventures.

Long Live the BIMSTEC Spirit.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu.

(Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen, MP)



Messages from the Foreign Ministers of the Member States on the occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Royal Government of Bhutan
Thimphu

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MESSAGE

I am pleased to extend my warmest greetings and best wishes to the peoples and Governments of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) on the occasion of the founding day.

In 2004, Bhutan joined the BIMSTEC family and has since then been nurturing mutually beneficial cooperation with all the Member States under various sectors. We have made tremendous progress and are on the cusp of adopting a Charter for the Organization and rationalized sectors of cooperation. Today is a day to reflect on our journey thus far, and a day to look ahead to the future.

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the primary focus of all the Member States have been on preventing the spread of Covid-19 and managing its multiple impacts. In Bhutan, we are blessed with the wise, compassionate and farsighted leadership of His Majesty The King who is always at the forefront in the fight against the pandemic and its impact on people's lives and livelihoods.

Today, our region is fighting a battle against the second wave of the pandemic. During such testing times, our region has witnessed the true spirit of friendship, solidarity, and cooperation. We have helped one another in different ways – those with better resources have assisted the less endowed; we have shared experiences and best practices, essential medicine, equipment, and vaccines, and assisted one another in the transit and evacuation of our citizens. The pandemic is here to stay, so our collaborative efforts must only continue and intensify.

As we celebrate this special day, I pray and wish everyone success in our fight against the virus and its various impacts. The Royal Government would like to reiterate its commitment and continued support to the purpose and principle of BIMSTEC.

Tashi Delek !

(Dr. Tandi Dorji)

Messages from the Foreign Ministers of the Member States on the occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021

Government of Nepal

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Singha Durbar
Kathmandu, Nepal**



Minister for Foreign Affairs

MESSAGE

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is going to complete twenty-four years of its establishment on 06 June 2021. On this happy occasion, I would like to extend my best wishes for the success of the organization in achieving peace, prosperity, and happiness for the people of our region.

Representing one-fifth of humanity, BIMSTEC stands as a bridge between South Asia and South East Asia. Blessed with rich natural resources, mosaic of cultural and age-old civilization, the BIMSTEC region embraces enormous potentials for the socio-economic development and prosperity of our peoples.

It is a matter of satisfaction that over the years, BIMSTEC as a regional organization has achieved several important milestones in key areas. Building on the decisions made at the 4th Summit in Kathmandu, BIMSTEC has achieved notable progress in institution building, improving administrative and financial management, and rationalizing the area of cooperation.

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed extraordinary challenges not experienced in the past. Precious lives are lost, and livelihoods are shattered, more so as we battle against the deadly second wave of corona-virus infections in our region. Hard-earned development gains including in the achievement of SDGs risk reversal. Common endeavors to fighting against poverty and hunger and ensuring decent job opportunities and sustainable sources of livelihoods for our people stand ever daunting.

Further, our region is hard hit by the adverse effects of climate changes, and natural disasters. The region is also not immune from the universal challenges of terrorism, organized crimes, illicit drugs, and human trafficking. BIMSTEC mechanisms and efforts should continue to be geared toward tackling these challenges.

On this important Day, let me reaffirm Nepal's firm commitment to working together for accelerating meaningful cooperation within the BIMSTEC framework. BIMSTEC will continue to grow as an engine for economic prosperity in the region. With an enduring spirit of solidarity, combined efforts, and collective wisdom, we will overcome the COVID crisis, we will address the climate crisis and we will rekindle the aspiration of our peoples for sustainable development.

Kathmandu, 1 June 2021

Pradeep Kumar Gyawali



Messages from the Foreign Ministers of the Member States on the occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021



**Foreign Minister
of the Democratic Socialist
Republic of Sri Lanka**

MESSAGE

On the special occasion of the 24th Anniversary of Bay of Bengal Initiatives for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), I wish to extend my greetings for all Member States and the organization.

BIMSTEC has contributed immensely for peace, stability and prosperity of our region during the last 24 years. I am confident that our friendly relationship and good cooperation between Member States and the Secretariat will be further strengthened and enhanced in the years to come for the benefit of our peoples.

As the world is in the brink of a major economic and social crisis due to the unprecedented devastation caused to human lives by the COVID-19 pandemic, BIMSTEC as a regional cooperation should play a vital supportive role in reviving the economies of Member States through cooperation in areas of expertise of Member States.

I would like to recall our renewed commitment at the recently concluded 17th Ministerial Meeting to endeavor to support BIMSTEC initiatives. Sri Lanka looks forward to host the 5th BIMSTEC Summit in the latter part of 2021 in Sri Lanka subject to the restrictions created by the pandemic.

As a founder Member Sri Lanka salutes all Member States for their untiring contributions to keep the wheels of BIMSTEC moving even during the pandemic.

**Dinesh Gunawardena (M.P)
Foreign Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**

Messages from the Foreign Ministers of the Member States on the occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Kingdom of Thailand

MESSAGE

I wish to extend my sincere congratulations to the Governments and the peoples of BIMSTEC on the auspicious occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021.

Over the past two decades, BIMSTEC has matured into a vibrant regional mechanism that fosters a close cooperation among the countries in the Bay of Bengal in areas that improve our peoples livelihood through promoting trade and economic cooperation, facilitating business, enhancing people-to-people contact, and furthering connectivity and security.

We have together accomplished the institution strengthening and sector prioritizing, and the Master Plan on Transport Connectivity- all important foundation on which further cooperation will be built. With the same will power and mutual respect, I believe that BIMSTEC will continue to enhance the agreement frameworks for our trade and business to prosper, our peoples to become closer, and to enhance our regional connectivity for mutual benefits.

At the same time, BIMSTEC must continue to be a platform to assist Member States with their socio-economic recovery from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. For Thailand, such recovery can be accomplished through the "Bio-Circular-Green Economic Model", which emphasizes investment in new technology for a balanced and sustainable growth path. Thailand will be exploring this concept during our Chairmanship by focusing cooperation in efficient use of resources, waste reduction and low-carbon emission. The BCG could be a new economic paradigm that strives for a balanced and sustainable growth for us all.

With a solid foundation, strengthened institution, and good will and solidarity, I am certain that the BIMSTEC community will leap forward in achieving sustainable recovery and forge ahead to the best of our potential.

Bangkok, 06 June, 2021

Don Pramudwinai
Deputy Prime Minister
and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand



Message from the Secretary General of BIMSTEC on the occasion of BIMSTEC Day 2021



Secretary General

06 June 2021

MESSAGE

On this auspicious occasion of the 24th Anniversary of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), I extend my heartiest greetings and felicitations to the people and the Governments of the BIMSTEC Member States.

Since its inception on 6 June 1997 as a sub-regional cooperation platform, BIMSTEC has evolved into a successful regional organization. The close cooperation among the Member States has been enhanced, which is evident in the successful finalization of the components of BIMSTEC's core instruments.

The BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity has been approved by the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting and it will be adopted by the 5th BIMSTEC Summit, which is expected to be held later this year. Successful implementation of this Master Plan will bring BIMSTEC much closer to achieve its goal of seamlessly connected Bay of Bengal region.

On this occasion, to enhance intra-regional trade and strengthen the economy and vibrancy of this region, I trust the Member States will be able to conclude the long cherished BIMSTEC Free Trade Area negotiations at the soonest. I would earnestly request Member States to step forward towards the goal of trade liberalization by concluding FTA before the 25th Anniversary of BIMSTEC next year.

Meanwhile, as we are witnessing an unprecedented situation in human history, my thoughts and prayers are with the people of the region who have lost their loved ones and are affected by the pandemic. Today, more than ever, inclusive and coordinated regional efforts are required to address a situation that exceeds the individual capacities of the Member States. It is heartening to see the BIMSTEC Member States work together to cope with the crises, while seeking to foster sustainable and resilient recovery from the pandemic. At the recent 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting held on 1st April 2021, the Member States also reiterated their commitment to strengthen cooperation on public health issues in the Bay of Bengal Region.

Let me also take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to the Government of Bangladesh for its initiative of constructing an iconic Secretariat building and for rendering administrative support and other services. I also thank Sri Lanka, the current Chair of BIMSTEC, for successfully holding a series of core meetings including the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting. My deep gratitude is extended to all the other Member States as well for their continued support and contribution in taking the BIMSTEC agenda forward.

To conclude, the Secretariat reiterates its firm commitment to pursue the goals and visions of the Organization as envisaged by the BIMSTEC Leaders.

(Tenzin Lekphell)



The Seventeenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting



The Seventeenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was convened virtually in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 01 April 2021 to finalize preparations for the Fifth BIMSTEC Summit to be held in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The Seventeenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was attended by His Excellency Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen, M.P., Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh; His Excellency Lyonpo (Dr.) Tandi Dorji, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Royal Government of Bhutan; His Excellency Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister of the Government of the Republic of India; His Excellency Mr. Ko Ko Hlaing, Union Minister for International Cooperation of the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar; His Excellency Mr. Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of Nepal; His Excellency Mr. Tharaka Balasuriya, State Minister of Regional Co-operation of the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; and His Excellency Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand and their respective delegations.

The Ministers noted with appreciation the extensive measures taken by the Governments of the BIMSTEC Member States in responding and supporting Member States to face the challenges posed by the COVID 19 pandemic at the national level, including providing COVID vaccines. They also encouraged the Member States to continue to support one another in the post-COVID-19 recovery and rehabilitation either through BIMSTEC framework or bilaterally, as appropriate, to foster the spirit of BIMSTEC solidarity.

They expressed their resolve to further mobilize all relevant Sectors and Sub-sectors of cooperation to strengthen economic and physical connectivity to enhance regional trade, investment, tourism, technology, energy and other forms of exchanges, including to offset the economic losses caused by the pandemic.

They resolved to mobilize all relevant Sectors and Sub-sectors of cooperation to strengthen the collective resilience to combat the challenges of poverty, natural disasters, climate change, pandemics and other public health emergencies, terrorism and transnational crimes, and food and energy security through partnership and joint actions, in harmony with the national implementation to achieve 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, keeping in mind that COVID-19 may not be the last calamity to befall our region.



They expressed deep appreciation to the Member States who have completed the internal procedures of the draft text of the BIMSTEC Charter and recommended the remaining Member States to complete their internal procedures for adoption of the BIMSTEC Charter at the BIMSTEC Summit.

The Ministers stressed the need to develop a resilient regional transport connectivity system capable of withstanding future disruptions with an enhanced focus on the development of coastal shipping, waterways and railways, road connections, and air cargo operation. They also expressed deep appreciation to the Member States for submitting the finalized draft of the **BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity**, and recommended it to the Fifth BIMSTEC Summit for adoption.

In addition, they agreed to recommend the signing of the following legal instruments during the Fifth BIMSTEC Summit:

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

The Ministers also noted the progress in the various sectors of cooperation and committed to further intensify their efforts to implement the directives given by the Leaders at the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit.

77th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP): “Building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific” on 26-29 April 2021(Virtual)



In his address at the 77th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP):“Building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific”, the Secretary General of BIMSTEC stressed on the importance of collaboration and cooperation in building back better. He also underscored the important role that technology plays in times of crisis such as the present one and highlighted the need for pooling of resources and expertise. He urged the countries to work together in the fight against the current pandemic for the benefit of all humanity.

First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Coordination Committee



The **First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Coordination Committee** (1st BGICC) was held virtually in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 30 June 2021. Delegations from all BIMSTEC Member States including the Designated National Representatives to constitute the BGICC attended the Meeting.

The Meeting was inaugurated by His Excellency Mr. Than Zaw, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Electricity and Energy of Myanmar. His Excellency Mr. Tenzin Lekphell, Secretary General of BIMSTEC delivered the Special Remarks at the opening session. The Meeting thanked Myanmar, the Lead Country of BIMSTEC Energy Cooperation, for taking an initiative to host the 1st BGICC Meeting.

At the Meeting, the Members of BGICC discussed their functions and mandate as mentioned in the **MOU for Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection** and **TOR of the BGICC**. The BGICC Members are mandated to coordinate implementation of grid interconnections and trade in electricity. The BGICC Members also shared their views on the “Way Forward of the BGICC” and deliberated on how to undertake the **BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Master Plan Study (BGIMPS)** among others.

The Meeting also touched on the importance of formulating a **BIMSTEC Policy for Transmission of Electricity** and a **BIMSTEC Policy for Trade, Exchange of Electricity and Tariff Mechanism** in accordance with the TOR of the BGICC.

In his Special Remarks, the Secretary General of BIMSTEC highlighted the importance of holding meetings of BIMSTEC Sectoral Cooperation regularly and expressed his conviction to have renewed commitment from the Member States on the holding of the **Third BIMSTEC Energy Ministers’ Meeting (3rd BEMM)** and the **Fifth Senior Officials’ Meeting on Energy (5th SOM-E)** respectively in due course.





Chief Editor



Tenzin Lekphell

Secretary General of BIMSTEC

Associate Editors



Han Thein Kyaw

Director
Development Division



Dr. Damaru Ballabha Paudel

Director
Social Affairs Division



Chhimmy Pem

Director
Cultural Division



Md. Mosharaf Hossain

Director
Administration & Coordination Division



Veerasakdi Prem-Aree

Director
Connectivity Division