



### Editorial



Welcome to the last edition of the BIMSTEC Newsletter for the year 2021. As we start the new year we hope to see some normalcy back in our lives that has been upended by the Covid-19 pandemic. We pray that 2022 will be kinder and happier.

I am personally happy and grateful that I have been able to make my introductory visit to Sri Lanka and meet with the Hon'ble President, the Hon'ble Prime Minister and all the other important and relevant officials with whom I have been able to discuss a range of issues. I hope to be able to visit the other Member States this year.

The last quarter of 2021 has been a rather busy time for the Secretariat. We are happy to report that all scheduled meetings and workshops have been able to be held on time with the participation of all Member States. These meetings have been able to discuss and agree on relevant matters that will then enable the forward movement of activities that have been delayed. The Secretariat is grateful to all the host Member States and to all participants for concluding these discussions successfully.

We have been able to strengthen the human resource of the Secretariat with the recruitment of four new staff members who will assist the respective Directors in the work of the various sectors. We also bid farewell to the first Director from Myanmar who returned to his country upon completion of his term here with the Secretariat. Simultaneously we are happy to welcome the second Director from Myanmar. We would like to wish everyone a very happy and safe 2022.

**Tenzin Lekphell**

Secretary General, BIMSTEC

### The Secretary General of BIMSTEC pays courtesy call on the President of Sri Lanka



The Secretary General of BIMSTEC called on the President of Sri Lanka, H.E. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, on 08 December, at the Office of the President in Colombo. Reaffirming Sri Lanka's commitment to BIMSTEC cooperation, the President expressed his dedication and keen interest to work with other Member States and the Secretary General to explore ways and means of ensuring that regional cooperation efforts through BIMSTEC translate into meaningful and tangible benefits that would directly impact the people of the region. The President also expressed commitment to strengthening the institutional framework of BIMSTEC and expressed confidence, as Chair of BIMSTEC, in hosting the 5th BIMSTEC Summit at the earliest possible, in 2022.

### Introductory visit of the Secretary General of BIMSTEC to Sri Lanka



The Secretary General of BIMSTEC, H.E. Tenzin Lekphell, visited Sri Lanka on an official introductory visit from 05-10 December 2021. This was the Secretary General's first official visit to a BIMSTEC Member State since assuming office on 06 November 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic prevented overseas travel previously.

During the visit, the Secretary General called on the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Hon. Mahinda Rajapaksa, Foreign Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris, and the State Minister of Regional Cooperation Tharaka Balasuriya.

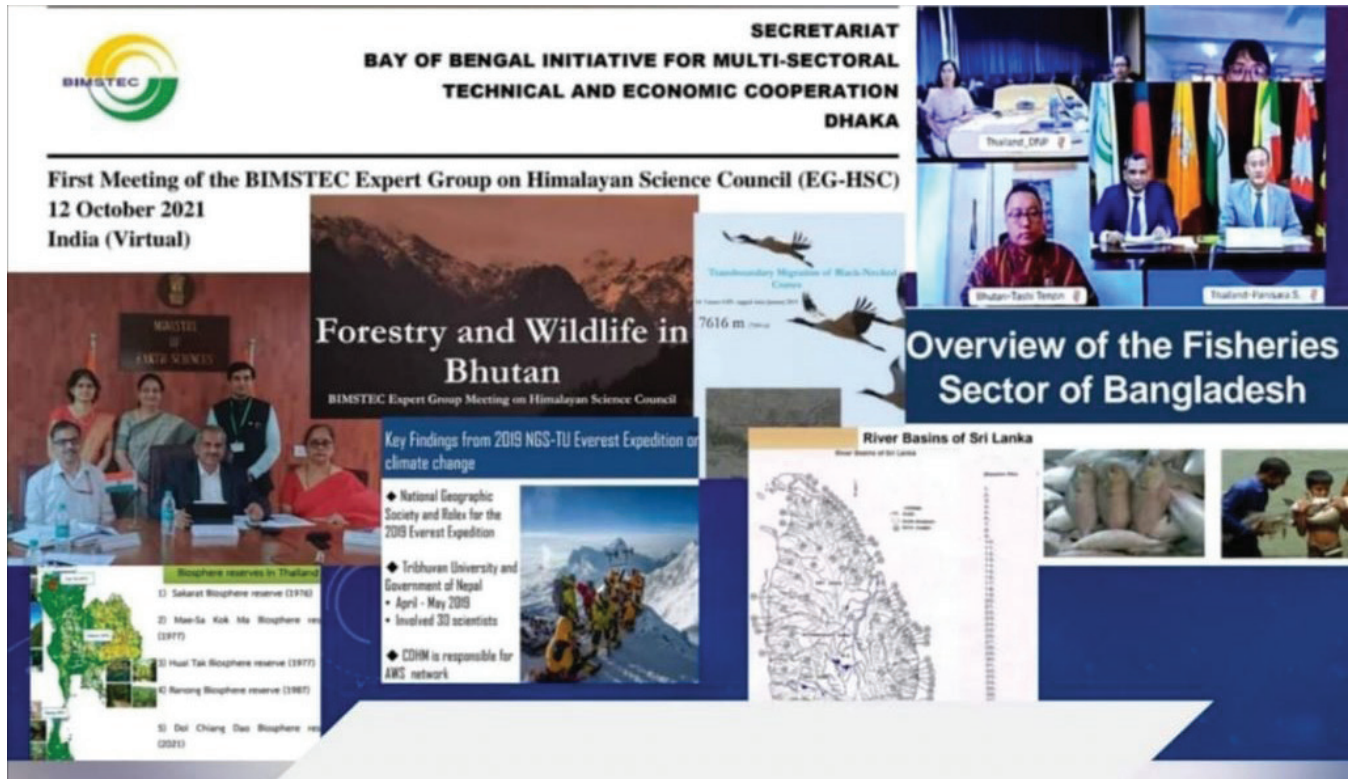
As Sri Lanka will be the lead country for coordinating cooperation in the Science, Technology and Innovation Sector, as well as the Sub-sectors of Public Health, Technology, and Human Resource Development as per the decision of the 17th Ministerial Meeting, that awaits the approval of the BIMSTEC Leaders at the 5th Summit, the Secretary General also held meetings with the Ministers and State Ministers in-charge of these subject areas - Minister of Health Dr. Keheliya Rambukwella, State Minister of Skills Development, Vocational Education, Research and



Additionally, the Secretary General held discussions with the Acting Foreign Secretary, A.M.J. Sadiq and officials of the Foreign Ministry handling matters related to BIMSTEC.

The Secretary General's Programme also included a brief visit to the Temple of the Tooth Relic in the UNESCO World Heritage Sacred City of Kandy.

## First Meeting of the Expert Group on Himalayan Science Council



The First Meeting of the Expert Group on Himalayan Science Council was held on 12 October 2021 virtually in New Delhi, India and was attended by all the Member States. The Meeting was presided over by H. E. Mr. M. Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India.

The delegates deliberated on the concept note on the establishment of the BIMSTEC Himalayan Science Council that was proposed to be set up to study the security impact of ecological and environmental degradation of the Himalayas and help alleviate disasters in the region.

## Secretary General addresses the Symposium on "BIMSTEC: A Vehicle for Growth and Development"



The Secretary General addressed the inaugural session of the Symposium on “**BIMSTEC: A Vehicle for Growth and Development**” on 25 October 2021. The symposium was organized by the Institute for Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) and the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India. The Secretary General presented an update on the recent developments in BIMSTEC and what to look forward to in the next few years.

## Sixth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on the Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances, Precursor Chemicals (SG-NDPSPC)

The collage features three main data visualizations:

- Drug Users:** A circular chart showing 23 crore users, 77 lakh problem users (2.1%), and 28 lakh dependent users (0.70%). A bar chart below shows 11 lakh opium, 63 lakh heroin, and 25 lakh pharma opioids users.
- Seizures:** A bar chart titled 'Seizures' showing trends from 2016 to 2021 for various drugs, with a note that seizures tend to increase due to large amounts being smuggled.
- Problem Users:** A bar chart comparing Heroin, Pharma Opioids, and Opium, with Heroin having the highest number of problem users.

The Sixth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on the Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances, Precursor Chemicals (SG-NDPSPC) was held virtually in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 28-29 October 2021 with the participation of all the Member States.

The Meeting discussed the development of a Plan of Action for the region and agreed on publishing an annual BIMSTEC drug report. Noting the importance of enhancing capacity in preventing and suppressing illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals the members encouraged the organization of capacity building programs by Member States as well as in collaboration with external multilateral organizations. The Meeting also recommended setting up of a hotline for the focal points for prevention, prosecution and suppression of illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances including precursor chemicals as well as setting up of an Electronic BIMSTEC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (BDOMD) in order to facilitate sharing of intelligence and information.

### The Ambassador of Thailand to Bangladesh calls on the Secretary General



The Ambassador of Thailand to Bangladesh H. E. Makawadee Sumitmor made an introductory call on the Secretary General of BIMSTEC on 05 October 2021. They held discussions on the upcoming Summit and Thailand's preparation for taking over as the Chair of BIMSTEC after Sri Lanka.

### Director of IFPRI calls on the Secretary General



The Director (South Asia Office) of the International Food Policy Research Institute Mr. Shahidul Rashid called on the Secretary General of BIMSTEC on 25 October 2021 to discuss collaboration between the two organizations.

## Call on by the Ambassador of the European Union to Bangladesh



The Ambassador of the European Union to Bangladesh H. E. C Whitely called on the Secretary General of BIMSTEC on 18 November 2021. The two discussed programs and activities related to BIMSTEC and possible collaboration between BIMSTEC and the EU.

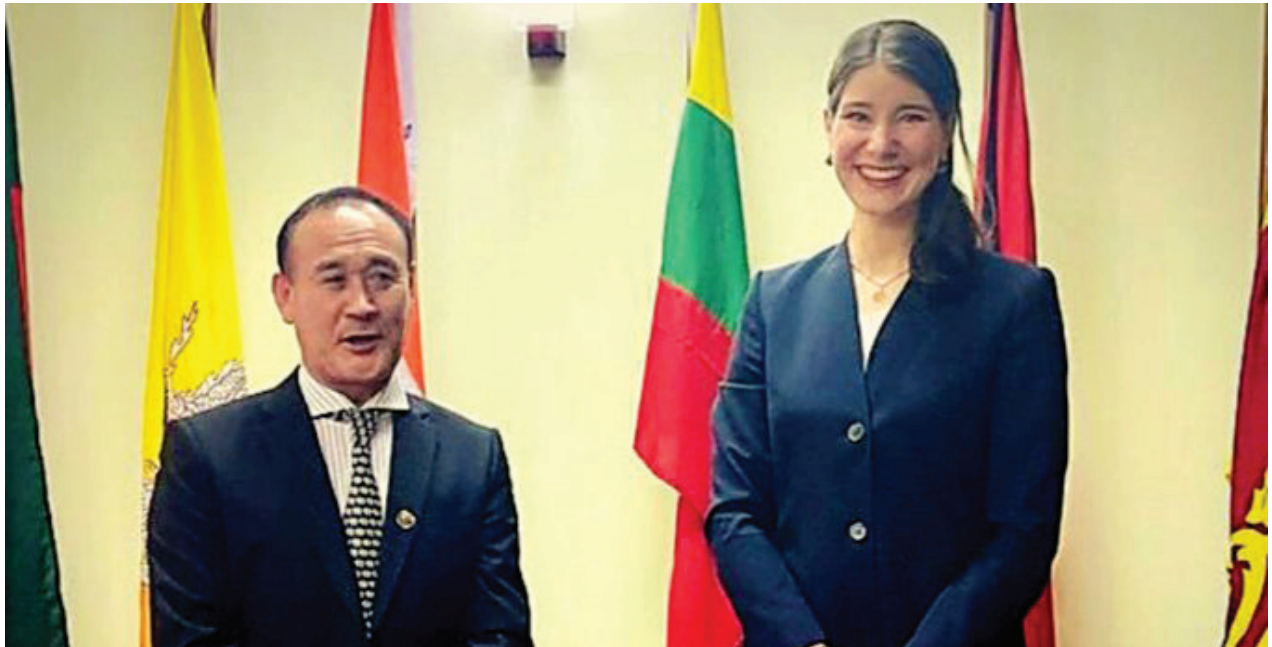
## Call on the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka by the Secretary General



On 16 November 2021 the Secretary General of BIMSTEC called on the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka H. E. Mr. G.L. Peiris at the Intercontinental Hotel, Dhaka. His Excellency the Foreign Minister was on an official visit to Bangladesh. They discussed a range of issues related to BIMSTEC including the hosting of the 5<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit by Sri Lanka as the current Chair.



## Call on by the Charge d'affaires of the Embassy of Germany in Bangladesh



Ms. Constanza Zaehring, the Charge d'affaires of the Embassy of Germany in Bangladesh called on the Secretary General of BIMSTEC on 28 November 2021 to discuss issues of mutual interest.

## Ninth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime



The Ninth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime was held on 25 November 2021 virtually. The Meeting was hosted and Chaired by Bhutan. The Hon'ble Minister of the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs of Bhutan, Lyonpo Ugyen Dorji graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. The Meeting discussed a range of issues and was able to finalize some important pending ones.

## Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-group on Cooperation on Countering Radicalization and Terrorism



The Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-group on Cooperation on Countering Radicalization and Terrorism was held virtually in New Delhi, India on 2 December 2021 with the participation of all the Member States. The participants shared the experiences and measures being taken in the respective Member States in terms of countering radicalization and terrorism. The Meeting discussed a concept note on cooperation on radicalization and terrorism as well as the Terms of Reference for the group.

## Third BIMSTEC Workshop on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)





The Third BIMSTEC Workshop on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) was held virtually in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 15 December 2021 with the participation of all the Member States. The Member States shared the status of implementation of GAP in their respective countries as well as the challenges being faced and recommendations on future cooperation.

### **Tri-services Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief Exercise: PANEX-21 for BIMSTEC Member States**



The Southern Command of the Indian Army organized a Tri-services Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief Exercise: PANEX-21 for BIMSTEC Member States in Pune, India from 20-22 December 2021. The Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army, General MM Naravane graced the opening of the event. The joint exercise provided an opportunity to assess and evaluate the efficiency of plans and procedures to deal with disasters in a pandemic situation. The exercise also enabled mutual understanding and sharing of best practices among disaster management experts.

The objective of this 3<sup>rd</sup> Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercise was to foster joint planning and preparation to institutionalize regional cooperation and inter-governmental efforts amongst BIMSTEC Member States to respond dynamically to a natural disaster in the backdrop of a viral pandemic.

### **New recruitments for the Secretariat**

In an effort to strengthen the human resource capacity of the Secretariat, four additional Lead Specialists at the GSS-II level were recruited through open competition. A total of 540 applicants were received against four vacancies. The Secretariat conducted interviews and a written examination for the short-listed candidates.

## Farewell/Welcome



The Secretariat bid farewell to the first Director from Myanmar, Mr. Han Thein Kyaw who went back to his country after successfully completing his term of office. Mr. Han served in the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka from May 2018 to November 2021. The Secretariat wishes him success in his new duties and responsibilities. Mr. Kyaw has been replaced by Mr. Tun Lynn Aung the second Director from Myanmar who joined the Secretariat on 18 November 2021. Prior to his appointment at the Secretariat, Mr. Aung served as Counsellor at the International Organizations and Economic Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Republic Union of Myanmar.

