



Editorial



Welcome to the July-September 2022 edition of the BIMSTEC Newsletter. This quarter has been a rather busy time for the Secretariat. In addition to holding of the many important sectoral meetings we were able to have the 5th BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPWC) Meeting physically after a gap of two years. BPWC being the main mechanism for progress of all BIMSTEC activities, the Secretariat is happy that the meeting was held successfully over a course of two and a half days with the participation and cooperation of all the Member States.

With the improvement in the COVID-19 pandemic situation, I was able to undertake two introductory courtesy visits to India and Bhutan. I would like to thank the Government of India and the Royal Government of Bhutan for the warm reception accorded to me and my delegation and for the fruitful discussions held at various levels. I returned with a renewed sense of commitment and support towards the BIMSTEC agenda and am hopeful of the potential that this organization has in strengthening cooperation and development in the Bay of Bengal region.

For the first time the Secretariat also welcomed the visits by the National Focal Points (NFP) of India and Thailand. Such visits enable better understanding and development of closer working relationship between the Secretariat and the NFPs. The Secretariat hopes that visits by other National Focal Points will also follow. The Secretariat was also happy to receive the delegation of the Ambassadors and Heads of the Missions of the ASEAN Member States based in Dhaka. We hope that this is the beginning of our closer engagement with ASEAN and look forward to more exchanges in the future.

Tenzin Lekphell

Secretary General, BIMSTEC

Secretary General visits India



The Secretary General of BIMSTEC H.E. Tenzin Lekphell paid an official introductory visit to India from 23-24 August 2022 at the invitation of the Secretary (East) of the Ministry of External Affairs of India Shri Saurabh Kumar.

The Secretary General held official discussions with Secretary Shri Saurabh Kumar on 23 August, during which Shri Saurabh Kumar reiterated India's commitment to strengthening BIMSTEC. As India leads the coordination of BIMSTEC cooperation on Security including Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC), Disaster Management, and Energy, the Secretary General had meetings with the Deputy National Security Adviser of India Shri Vikram Misri, Secretary to the Ministry of Power Shri Alok Kumar and Member-Secretary to the National Disaster Management Authority Shri Kamal Kishore during which BIMSTEC sectoral cooperation in these respective areas was discussed.

On 24 August, the Secretary General called on the Minister of State for External Affairs Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh. Recalling the pledge made by the Prime Minister of India, H.E. Shri Narendra Modi, during the 5th BIMSTEC Summit held in Colombo on 30 March 2022, the Minister of State handed over a cheque of USD 1 million to the Secretary General towards the operational budget of the BIMSTEC Secretariat. This invaluable contribution by the Government of India is to be utilised to complete key institution building tasks collectively identified by the BIMSTEC Member States.



The Secretary General also participated in a public interactive session on "Rejuvenating Growth through Partnership: Role of BIMSTEC" organized by the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS). The Ambassadors of Bhutan, Myanmar, and Thailand resident in New Delhi as well as senior diplomats of BIMSTEC country diplomatic missions in New Delhi participated in this programme.

Secretary General calls on the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bhutan



The Secretary General of BIMSTEC who was on his introductory visit to Bhutan paid a courtesy call on the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bhutan, His Excellency Dasho Dr. Lotey Tshering at the Gyalong Tshokhang in Thimphu on 2nd September 2022. The Secretary General updated the Hon'ble Prime Minister on the progress of BIMSTEC in the various areas of cooperation as well as the challenges and the steps being initiated to address them.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister welcomed the Secretary General and his team to Bhutan and expressed his concern on the dismal trade that is taking place between the BIMSTEC Member States. He was concerned that if it was going to be business as usual there will not be much impact on the ground. However, he saw the potential of BIMSTEC and the need to relook at the organisation and have dialogues at a different level. He assured Bhutan's full commitment in taking the BIMSTEC agenda forward and that the Secretary General should guide in terms of what support the organisation requires from Bhutan. He welcomed the proposal of the formation of an Eminent persons Group to review the organisation, its challenges and opportunities and chart a way forward for BIMSTEC.

Secretary General calls on the Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Bhutan

The Secretary General of BIMSTEC called on the Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Dr. Tandi Dorji at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thimphu, Bhutan. His Excellency warmly welcomed the Secretary General and his team to Bhutan and congratulated the Secretariat on the successful conclusion of the 5th BIMSTEC Summit and the signing of the BIMSTEC Charter. The Secretary General updated His Excellency on his introductory visits to the other Member States and the fruitful discussions that he had with them. Exchange of ideas and information were held on various issues concerning BIMSTEC including fixing the Ministerial Meeting timeframe. His Excellency requested the BIMSTEC Secretariat to work on accelerating transport connectivity, inter-grid connectivity as well as the establishment of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO). The Secretary General in turn reassured him and updated him on the new developments in these areas. On his part His Excellency assured the Secretary General of Bhutan's full support to the Secretariat and the work that it is doing.



Secretary General calls on the Hon'ble Minister of Home & Cultural Affairs and the Minister of Economic Affairs of Bhutan

While in Bhutan the Secretary General called on the Minister of Home and Cultural Affairs, His Excellency Lyonpo Ugyen Dorji as well as the Minister of Economic Affairs His Excellency Lyonpo Loknath Sharma. The Secretary General briefed the Ministers on the developments within the respective areas of cooperation and held discussions on the way forward. The Hon'ble Ministers assured the Secretary General of their commitment and support to the BIMSTEC agenda.



Meeting with the Secretary of the National Environment Commission Secretariat of Bhutan



The Secretary General also met with the Secretary of the National Commission Secretariat of Bhutan Mr. Sonam P. Wangdi and his team. The Secretary General thanked the Secretary for proposing to host the First Meeting of the Joint Working Group on Environment and Climate Change in person which however had to be postponed due to inconvenience of some Member States. As the line agency leading cooperation in the Environment and Climate Change sector the National Environment Commission Secretariat assured the Secretary General of their support in ensuring that the First Meeting of the Joint Working Group on Environment and Climate Change would be rescheduled soon as well as their commitment in developing a regional plan of action of cooperation in the sector.

Third Meeting of the Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum



The Third Meeting of the Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum was hosted virtually by Thailand from 6-7 July 2022 with participation from all Member States. Academics and scholars from the region also participated in the discussions. The Meeting discussed a range of topics that included both traditional and non-traditional security issues.

Training for Law Enforcement Officers

India organised a training for twenty-six Law Enforcement Officers from the BIMSTEC countries at the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy in New Delhi. The training was conducted from 4-15 July 2022 and covered cyber security, counter terrorism, transnational organised crime, de-radicalisation and other law enforcement challenges.



First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Cyber Security Cooperation

The National Security Council Secretariat of the Government of India hosted the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Cyber Security Cooperation on 14-15 July 2022 in New Delhi. The Meeting discussed issues related to cyber security including the setting up of a Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) by 2025 as well as the creation of a cyber crime cooperation framework among the law enforcement agencies. The Member States agreed to share best practices and experiences, and finalise a Five-Year Action Plan for Cyber Security Cooperation.



Visits by National Focal Points



On 25 July 2022 Mr. Cherdchai Chaivaivid, Director General of Economic Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Thailand, and his delegation visited the BIMSTEC Secretariat for consultations on various issues of coordination representing Thailand as the current Chair of BIMSTEC.

The Additional Secretary (BIMSTEC & SAARC) and the National Focal Point for BIMSTEC at the Ministry of External Affairs in India also visited the BIMSTEC Secretariat on 25 July 2022 to discuss various issues. The BIMSTEC Secretariat was happy to receive the visits from the two Member States and have the opportunity of discussing many issues.

Visit by the ASEAN Dhaka Committee Ambassadors

On 3 August 2022 the BIMSTEC Secretariat welcomed the Ambassadors and Heads of the Missions of the ASEAN Member States based in Dhaka. A first visit of its kind, the Secretariat made a presentation on BIMSTEC and its activities and priorities to the delegation which was followed by a question and answer session. The Secretariat is hopeful that such visits and meetings would bring the two organizations closer and would enable learning and sharing experiences from each other.



Twelfth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (Virtual)



The Twelfth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of terrorism was held on 16 August 2022 in Bangkok, Thailand virtually. The participants discussed the finalization of a report on flow of illicit funds and an Action Plan to prevent the flow of illicit funds. In addition, the Meeting also discussed the implementation of human resource development and capacity building to combat money laundering and financing of terrorism. The Meeting welcomed offers by Bangladesh, India and Thailand for various capacity building and training programs.

BIMSTEC Workshop on Encouraging Private Sector Participation Especially in Value Chain Management for Agricultural Products Developing Value Chain through Post Harvest Management



Sri Lanka hosted a BIMSTEC Workshop on Encouraging Private Sector Participation Especially in Value Chain Management for Agricultural Products Developing Value Chain through Post Harvest Management, virtually, in Kandy on 15-16 August 2022, in which representatives of the governments of the BIMSTEC Member States, as well as representatives of Sri Lankan private sector participated. The Workshop included success stories and ideas regarding the way forward on Post Harvest Value Chain Management. The representatives of the Member States shared their experiences and learned new aspects of value-chain management in agricultural products.

Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Working Group to finalize the Draft Text of the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation



The Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Working Group to finalize the Draft Text of the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation was hosted virtually by India on 30th August 2022 in New Delhi. Besides discussions on the Draft Text of the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation, the Meeting also agreed on the drafting of a Standard Operating Procedure on Maritime Transport Cooperation.

First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Maritime Security Cooperation



The First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Maritime Security Cooperation (EG-MC) was held in person in New Delhi, India on 6th September 2022 with the participation of all Member States. The Meeting agreed on sharing of information and best practices as well as having more workshops, capacity building activities and other interactive sessions to enhance cooperation in the maritime domain, disaster management, maritime security and blue economy. The Meeting also finalized the concept paper on maritime cooperation in the Bay of Bengal.

Ninth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Agricultural Cooperation



The 9th Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Agricultural Cooperation was held virtually in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 8th September 2022. The Meeting reviewed the progress of implementation of decisions since the last meeting as well as updated the draft Plan of Action and the template of the implementation plan on strengthening BIMSTEC agricultural cooperation.

5th BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee Meeting



Thailand as the current Chair of BIMSTEC hosted the 5th BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee Meeting in person from 13-15 September 2022 in Bangkok, Thailand. The meeting, attended by all the National Focal Points of the Member States, discussed various important issues that were pending for the last two years. Among others, the meeting discussed the Rules of Procedure for the mechanisms of BIMSTEC as well as the BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030 that was proposed by Thailand.

Ambassador of Nepal to Bangladesh calls on the Secretary General of BIMSTEC



The newly appointed Ambassador of Nepal to Bangladesh H.E. Ghanshyam Bhandari called on the Secretary General of BIMSTEC Tenzin Lekphell at the BIMSTEC Secretariat on 18 September 2022. Discussions covered a range of issues related to regional cooperation.

Taking BIMSTEC to schools



Photographs from the "BIMSTEC on Tour" programme involving reach out to high school students in Thailand to create awareness about BIMSTEC.



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