

Editorial



Welcome to the January-March 2023 Edition of the BIMSTEC e-Newsletter!

The first quarter of 2023 had been busy for all of us with the preparation and hosting of the Nineteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, Twenty Third BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting, BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee Meeting and few other important meetings & events.

We are glad to report that all the meetings & events were conducted successfully and engagements with our partners were very enriching & meaningful. The first quarter was, indeed, an eventful and productive one. We look forward to such engagements in the current quarter as well.

Further, we are also pleased to report that the first ever Quiz Contest was organized in Thimphu on 15 February 2023 among the Member States, focusing on youth in the region. The BIMSTEC Secretariat also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Food Policy Research Institute, formalizing the partnership between the two institutions.

Moving on, in the current quarter, the BIMSTEC Secretariat will be making a visit to the Association of South East Asian Nations Secretariat in Jakarta to learn from them on their best practices and to explore opportunities for partnership. As usual, we will also be organizing meetings & events and engaging with our partners in the coming days and months. We will keep our readers informed.

I look forward to receiving feedback on the e-Newsletter and wish you all a happy reading!



(Tenzin Lekphell)
Secretary General, BIMSTEC

Nineteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting



The Nineteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was held virtually on 09 March 2023. As the current chair of BIMSTEC, Thailand organized the Meeting under the chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand with the participation from all BIMSTEC Member States.

The Meeting endorsed the draft BIMSTEC Vision 2030, draft BIMSTEC Rules of Procedure for Core Mechanisms, Sectoral Mechanisms & External Relations and draft Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation for submission to the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit. The Meeting also approved the Terms of Reference for Eminent Persons Group on the Future Directions of BIMSTEC and other important documents related to the administrative & financial matters.

Further, the Meeting reiterated the purpose of BIMSTEC to promote active collaboration & mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, technical & scientific fields and reviewed the progress made in the respective BIMSTEC areas of cooperation.

The full text of the Joint Statement can be accessed at www.bimstec.org

Twenty Third BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting



The Twenty Third Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting was held virtually on 08 March 2023. The Meeting was convened under the chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Sarun Charoensuwan, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand with the participation comprising Foreign Secretaries, Secretaries, and Senior Officials from all BIMSTEC Member States.

The Meeting was crucial and timely in terms of taking stock of the progress made thus far and also in brainstorming and preparing for outcomes of the Nineteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meetings and Sixth BIMSTEC Summit Accordingly, the Meeting reviewed the progress of work since the 5th BIMSTEC Summit, reported on the progress in the areas of cooperation and deliberated on other important documents related to the administrative & financial matters.

The Meeting also considered the draft BIMSTEC Vision 2030, draft BIMSTEC Rules of Procedure for Core Mechanisms, Sectoral Mechanisms & External Relations and draft Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation for submission to the Nineteenth Ministerial Meeting.

The Heads of delegation of the Member States conveyed their deep appreciation and gratitude to the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand for successfully hosting the Ministerial Meeting virtually.

Meeting of BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee



The Sixth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee was held in Bangkok, Thailand on 01-02 February 2023. The Meeting finalized the Rules of Procedure for BIMSTEC's core mechanisms, sectoral mechanisms, and external relations. The Rules are expected to ensure proper functioning of the BIMSTEC mechanisms and its meaningful engagement with the external partners.

A special Meeting of the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee was also held virtually on 23 January 2023 to discuss on the Rules of Procedure for BIMSTEC' External Relations. The Meeting finalized the Rules of Procedure and the Rules is expected to promote collaboration and partnership between the BIMSTEC and external organizations. All BIMSTEC Member States were represented at both the Meeting.

Tenth Meeting of Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime

The Tenth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Transnational Crime was held in New Delhi, India on 12-13 January 2023. The Meeting was organized by India and all BIMSTEC Member States were represented at the Meeting.

The Meeting specifically deliberated on traditional and emerging non-traditional security threats in the region. The Meeting also proposed recommendations on a wide range of issues for enhancing cooperation and collaboration in countering terrorism and transnational crime in the region.



First Meeting of Governing Board of BIMSTEC Energy Centre

The Governing Board of the BIMSTEC Energy Centre held its first Meeting in Bengaluru, India, on 27 February 2023 with the participation of Governing Board Members representing all BIMSTEC Member States. During the Meeting, Mr. Ghanshyam Prasad was appointed as the first Executive Director of the Centre for an initial period of three years.

Among other matters that were deliberated in the Meeting, the Governing Board discussed the formulation of the Rules of Procedure for the Centre and finalized the text of the Host Country Agreement to be submitted for consideration by the higher authorities of BIMSTEC.



2nd Meeting of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Coordination Committee

The Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Coordination Committee (BGICC) was held in Bengaluru, India on 28 February 2023. The Meeting discussed the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding for Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection including the preparation of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Master Plan Study, BIMSTEC Policy for Transmission of Electricity and BIMSTEC Policy for Trade, Exchange of Electricity & Tariff Mechanism.



Fourth Meeting of BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group

The Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group was held virtually on 20 March 2023. The Meeting was organized by Thailand with the participation of representatives from all BIMSTEC Member States. The Meeting decided to set up an Expert Group which will update and modify the list of identified projects to keep the Master Plan a live document, while also working out the modalities for implementation of the Master Plan.

Decisions taken at the meeting included the convening of the Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Working Group to negotiate the draft text of the Motor Vehicles Agreement during the second quarter of this year. The Meeting also reviewed the Report of the Third Meeting of the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group which was held virtually on 08 December 2020.



BIMSTEC Silver Jubilee Quiz Contest



The first ever BIMSTEC Silver Jubilee Quiz Contest was organized in Thimphu, Bhutan on 15 February 2023 with the participation from all BIMSTEC Member States. H.E. Dr. Tandi Dorji, Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Bhutan was the Chief Guest at the contest. H.E. Mr. Tenzin Lekphell, Secretary General of BIMSTEC and other senior officials of the Diplomatic Missions of the Member States based in Thimphu & Royal Government of Bhutan also attended the contest.

The team comprising Ms. Medhini Wanigaratne and Ms. Sayurangi Premasiri representing Sri Lanka was declared as the winner of the contest. The teams representing Nepal (Ms. Aayusha Bohara and Mr. Sushank Paudel) and India (Ms. Reet and Mr. Ron Dutta) stood as the first and second runners-up respectively. The winning team from Sri Lanka received trophy & medals and participants from other Member States were also awarded certificates.

The quiz contest was a good opportunity for the youth of the region to interact and foster friendship among themselves. Participants were very happy and satisfied with the contest. The participants also expressed their hope that the BIMSTEC will organize such Youth related programmes in the near future.

The contest was organized by the BIMSTEC Secretariat in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & External Trade of Bhutan to mark BIMSTEC's Silver Jubilee, recognizing the importance of young people in driving regional cooperation and integration.

Memorandum of Understanding between BIMSTEC Secretariat and IFPRI



A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the BIMSTEC Secretariat and International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 05 March 2023. H.E. Mr. Tenzin Lekphell, Secretary General of BIMSTEC and Dr. Johan Swinnen, Director General of IFPRI signed the MoU representing the respective organizations.

The signing ceremony was also attended by H.E. Dr. Mashiur Rahman, Economic Affairs Advisor to Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Mr. Shabbir Ahmad, Secretary Bilateral (West) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, Dr. Purvi Mehta of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the officials of BIMSTEC Secretariat & IFPRI.

The MoU primarily focuses on conducting research and facilitating capacity development in order to explore the full potential in agriculture sector of the BIMSTEC region. Through this partnership, BIMSTEC Secretariat and IFPRI will collaborate to enhance food security, nutrition, agricultural productivity and trade in the region. The partnership is also expected to promote inclusive transformation of food system and rural development in the region.

The signing of MoU marked a formal partnership between the BIMSTEC Secretariat & IFPRI. The signing of MoU will also provide a framework for the two organizations to partner and collaborate on a wide range of activities for the benefit of the BIMSTEC region.

Seminar on Food Security and Sustainable Food Systems

A Regional Seminar on Food Security and Sustainable Food Systems in BIMSTEC region was held virtually on 25 January 2023 with the participation of representatives from all BIMSTEC Member States. The seminar underscored the importance of food system transformation and building resilience to vulnerabilities in the post-COVID 19 era.

The representatives discussed the current status of their food information system and exchanged views on how to overcome the existing challenges of ensuring food security during the Seminar. Further, experts from the government and private sectors present at the Seminar shared their views on food security, transformation of food systems, and climate resilience for the benefit of the people of the Bay of Bengal region. The Seminar was organized by Myanmar.



Second ISCS BIMSTEC Conference

The Second Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) BIMSTEC Conference themed **“BIMSTEC: 25 Years of Driving Force behind Neighborhood Cooperation”** was held in Kolkata on March 25-26, 2023. The Conference was organized by ISCS based in Kolkata to deliberate on various policy issues that promote multilateral cooperation among BIMSTEC Member States.

The Conference was inaugurated by Mr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Minister of State, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India in presence of Mr. Tenzin Lekphell, Secretary General, BIMSTEC Secretariat, and Mr. Arindam Mukherjee, Director, ISCS, India. Diplomatic representatives and policy researchers from the BIMSTEC Member States also attended the Conference.

The Conference was a unique opportunity for the attendees to reflect on the achievements of BIMSTEC over the past 25 years and to identify areas to enhance cooperation and partnership among the BIMSTEC Member States. The Conference also deliberated on Transport Connectivity, Food Security, Climate Change, Educational Cooperation, Cultural Exchanges and Civilizational Linkages and People to People Connect among many other pertinent issues.





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