

### Editorial



Welcome to the July-September 2023 Edition of the BIMSTEC e-Newsletter!

This edition brings you another significant milestone in BIMSTEC' journey, as we continue to work towards transforming BIMSTEC into a vibrant institution. BIMSTEC organized its first ever Foreign Ministers' Retreat on 17 July, 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand. The Retreat was organized under the able chairmanship of Thailand with participation of all Foreign Ministers from the Member States. The success of the Retreat was evident in the unanimous decision of organizing the Retreat as a regular event, marking a commitment to deeper regional cooperation.

One notable highlight in the quarter was the signing of the Host Country Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the BIMSTEC Secretariat for the establishment of the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate in India. Further, in line with our core objectives, BIMSTEC organized the Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Himalayan Science Council, First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Public Health and First meeting of BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Human Trafficking.

Looking ahead, as we approach the last quarter of 2023, BIMSTEC eagerly anticipates important engagements particularly, the 6<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit to be held in Thailand. The Summit will bring together BIMSTEC Leaders, fostering partnerships and forging a path towards more meaningful regional engagement and progress.

We look forward to your valuable feedback for further improvement.



**(Tenzin Lekphell)**  
Secretary General, BIMSTEC

## BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Retreat



Thailand, under its chairmanship organized the inaugural Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Bangkok on 17 July 2023. The Retreat was chaired by H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Thailand with participation of Foreign Ministers from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

At the Retreat, the Ministers, *inter alia*, recognized the need to reinforce BIMSTEC's organizational framework and collaborative mechanisms with an aim of transforming BIMSTEC into a dynamic institution that fosters growth and prosperity in the region. The Ministers also welcomed the progress on the setting up of an Eminent Persons Group to chart out the road map for the organization to ensure greatest benefits to Member States and their peoples.

The discussions during the Retreat were broad-ranging and included regional and global concerns such as Sustainable Development Goals and climate change. There was a consensus on the importance of establishing a crisis response mechanism, capable of coordinating various contingencies. The Ministers placed a strong emphasis on areas such as food security, public health, energy, financial stability, and trade & economic cooperation. Further, areas that received attention during the Retreat included the creation of a digital payment system & trade settlement, strengthening cooperation in cyber security & prevention of transnational crimes, BIMSTEC grid interconnection, agriculture technology, cultural cooperation, youth exchange programs, and diplomatic training.

The Ministers underscored the importance of the Retreat and appreciated its usefulness. The Retreat, in essence, provided a platform for the Ministers for informal discussions and exchange of ideas. As such, the Ministers agreed to hold a Retreat on a regular basis, preferably in the first quarter of each year.

The Retreat concluded with a renewed determination among the Ministers to make BIMSTEC, a stronger and more resilient institution.

## Host Country Agreement for the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate Signed



The Host Country Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the BIMSTEC Secretariat for the establishment of the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate in India was inked at the High Commission of India in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 24 August 2023.

This pivotal agreement was signed by H.E. Mr. Tenzin Lekphell, the BIMSTEC Secretary General, representing the Secretariat and H.E. Mr. Pranay Verma, High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh, acting on behalf of the Government of the Republic of India.

The Centre will play a vital role in advancing the application of cutting-edge scientific and technical tools to enhance disaster preparedness and improve early warning systems. It will also actively promote and support the dissemination of critical research findings related to weather and climate induced disasters.

Further, the Centre will serve as a facilitator for collaborative research and development initiatives in weather and climate modeling. This collaborative effort will lead to the reinforcement of weather prediction techniques, contributing to the reduction of loss of life and property caused by natural disasters across the BIMSTEC region.

This momentous event underscores India's unwavering commitment to bolstering regional cooperation within the framework of BIMSTEC and represents a significant stride towards shared goal of enhancing disaster resilience and fostering well-being in the region.

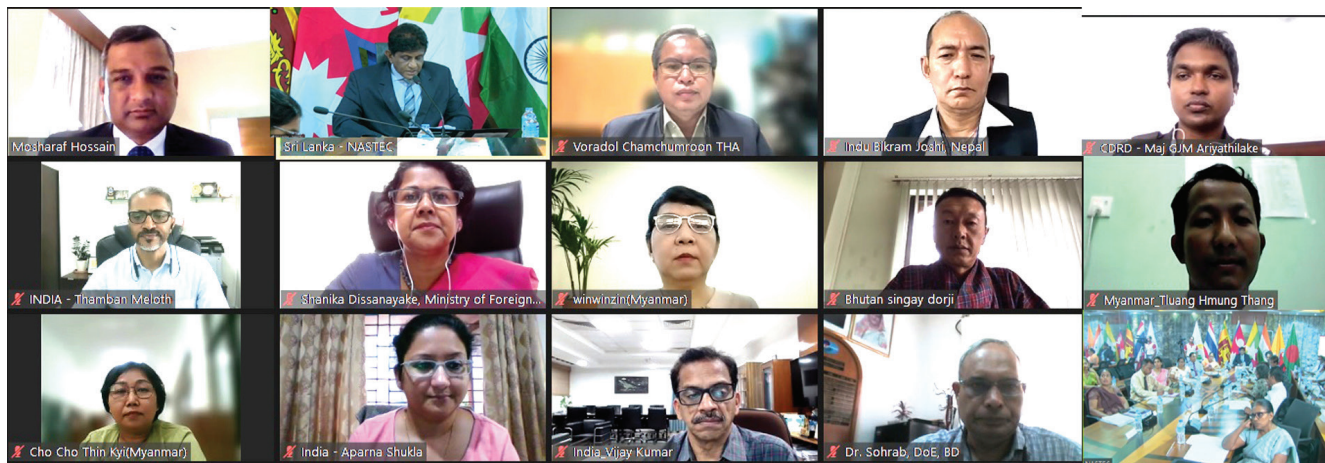
## Secretary General of BIMSTEC called on Sri Lanka's President

H.E. Mr. Tenzin Lekphell, BIMSTEC Secretary General called on H.E. Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in Colombo on 25 July, 2023. During the Meeting, President Wickremesinghe reiterated Sri Lanka's firm commitment to strengthen regional cooperation under BIMSTEC.



Secretary General Tenzin Lekphell was in Sri Lanka to attend a two-day Conference on Improving Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response in Colombo on 24-25 July, 2023 organized by the Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka, in partnership with the World Bank.

## Second Meeting of BIMSTEC Expert Group on Himalayan Science Council



Sri Lanka hosted the Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Himalayan Science Council virtually on 26 July 2023. The Meeting was attended by representatives from all BIMSTEC Member States.

The Meeting's decisions, amongst others, included the finalization of the Concept Paper titled '**Proposal for the Himalayan Science Council under the BIMSTEC**' and forming Working Groups of different disciplines under the proposed BIMSTEC Himalayan Science Council.

The BIMSTEC Himalayan Science Council will be a high-level inter-governmental scientific forum to encourage cooperation and coordination among the BIMSTEC Member States in the field of Earth System Science.

## First Meeting of BIMSTEC Expert Group on Public Health



The First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Public Health was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 26-27 July 2023 in hybrid mode, with the participation of delegations from all BIMSTEC Member States.

The Meeting discussed a range of issues relating to Public Health in the region, and finalized, among others, the Terms of Reference of the Expert Group, the BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Public Health 2023-2025, and a Memorandum of Understanding between the BIMSTEC Secretariat and the World Bank on Collaboration on Strengthening Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response, and Health Systems Resilience among BIMSTEC Member States.

The Meeting of the Expert Group was preceded by a Conference on Improving Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response (PPR) through One Health Approach co-hosted by the Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka and the World Bank on 24-25 July 2023. The Conference included presentations on Country Perspectives on Pandemic Preparedness and Best Practices by the delegates to the First BIMSTEC Expert Group on Public Health; Panel Discussions; Lightning Talks on latest developments in the global PPR landscape; and Group Exercises.

The Inauguration of the Conference was attended by the Minister of Health of Sri Lanka, Hon. Keheliya Rambukwella, the Secretary to the Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka, Mr. Janaka Chandraguptha, Secretary General of BIMSTEC, H.E. Tenzin Lekphell, Country Manager of the World Bank in Sri Lanka, Ms. Chiyo Kanda, Senior Advisor on National Security and Chief of Presidential Staff, Mr. Sagala Ratnayake, and senior officials of the Government of Sri Lanka as well as experts and officials from several other countries, and regional and international organizations.

## **BIMSTEC’s Capacity Building for Improving the Quality of life through Creative Economy and BCG Economy Model**



The Ubon Ratchathani University of Thailand in partnership with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation of the Kingdom of Thailand has organized a six day training program titled **“BIMSTEC’s Capacity Building for Improving the Quality of life through Creative Economy and BCG Economy Model”** from September 05-10, 2023 in Ubon, Thailand. The program was attended by relevant officials and academics from the BIMSTEC Member States.

The program primarily focused on creating awareness on BIMSTEC and sharing knowledge and experience in related areas among the participants. The program also had sessions on Quadruple Helix Model, Lean Canvas Model, Smart Agricultural Systems, Bioenergy production procedures, Smart farming concepts and creative economy.

One of the highlights of the program was the implementation of smart agricultural systems as agriculture is one of the prominent sectors in the BIMSTEC region which can significantly contribute to the region’s economy. Moreover, agriculture has the potential to attract young minds and contribute to economic growth.

The program was conducted with a blend of discussions and hands-on onsite visits. Participants acknowledged that the program was a commendable initiative fostering collaboration, cultural exchange, tourism promotion and knowledge sharing among all involved.

## BIMSTEC Workshop on Development of Seed in Member States



A BIMSTEC Workshop on Development of Seed Sector in BIMSTEC Member States was hosted in New Delhi, India, in virtual mode, on 06 September 2023. Officials representing the governments of BIMSTEC Member States participated in the Workshop. The workshop primarily focused on issues related to seed development across the BIMSTEC region.

During the workshop, participants also shared their experience and insights regarding seed development projects in their respective countries and proposed a series of recommendations. The recommendations included strengthening the regulatory framework governing the seed sector, organizing regular workshops/training programmes, exchange of knowledge and fostering partnerships between research institutions, universities, and the private sector to accelerate innovation in the seed sector.

## First Meeting of BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Human Trafficking



The First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Human Trafficking was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 26-27 September 2023. The meeting was organized by the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of Bangladesh with participation of relevant officials from the Member States.

The Meeting finalized the Terms of Reference of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Human Trafficking. The Meeting also took note of the draft Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking in the Bay of Bengal Region and felt the need of updating it as well as incorporating other related issues in connection with combating Human Trafficking in the Plan of Action.



## **BIMSTEC CHARTER (PURPOSES)**

The purposes of BIMSTEC are to:

- 1.** Create an enabling environment for rapid economic development through identification and implementation of specific cooperation projects in the already agreed areas of cooperation and such other areas that may be agreed upon by the Member States;
- 2.** Accelerate the economic growth and social progress in the Bay of Bengal region through joint endeavours in a spirit of equality and partnership;
- 3.** Promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, technical and scientific fields;
- 4.** Provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional and technical spheres;
- 5.** Cooperate more effectively in joint efforts that are supportive of and complementary to national development plans of the Member States;
- 6.** Cooperate in projects that can be dealt with most productively on a regional basis among the BIMSTEC Member States and that make best use of available synergies;
- 7.** Maintain peace and stability in the Bay of Bengal region through close collaboration in combating international terrorism, transnational organized crimes as well as natural disasters, climate change and communicable diseases;
- 8.** Maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes;
- 9.** Endeavor to eradicate poverty from the Bay of Bengal region;
- 10.** Establish multidimensional connectivity, promote synergy among connectivity frameworks in the region, as a key enabler to economic integration for shared prosperity; and
- 11.** Promote trade and investment as a major contributing factor for fostering economic and social development in the region.

### **BIMSTEC SECRETARIAT**

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