



BIMSTEC

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

BIMSTEC e-NEWSLETTER

Volume 13, Issue 04, ISSN 2415-4318



April 2024 Issue

Editorial



Welcome to the 4th Edition of our monthly BIMSTEC e-Newsletter of 2024!

My introductory visit to Sri Lanka, participation at the 80th Session of UNESCAP and engagements with other UN and International and Regional Organizations based in Bangkok and my brief visit to Delhi were highly rewarding and fruitful.

It was a privilege to call on Hon'ble President, Ministers and Senior Officials of the Government of Sri Lanka and seek their guidance for deepening regional cooperation among the BIMSTEC member States.

I had the privilege to participate at the 80th Session of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP) held in Bangkok, Thailand, including keynote address at the side event on "Leveraging Digital Innovation for Promoting Cross-Border Connectivity in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) Subregion, co-hosted by UNESCAP and BIMSTEC.

I also had the opportunity to interact with heads of various regional organization in Asia and Pacific on the sidelines of the 80th Session of UNESCAP and discuss cooperation between BIMSTEC and their organizations. Discussions with H.E. Jaideep Mazumdar, Secretary (East) at the Ministry of External Affairs were very fruitful.

The inaugural meeting of the BIMSTEC Inter-governmental Expert Group on Mountain Economy (IEG-ME) took place in Thimphu, Bhutan. It finalized the Terms of Reference of IEG-ME, and the Concept Note and Plan of Action on BIMSTEC Mountain Economy.

We sincerely value your continued readership and look forward to receiving your valuable suggestions.

Happy Reading!

(Indra Mani Pandey)
Secretary General

Secretary General on Introductory Visit to Sri Lanka 08-11 April 2024



The Secretary General, H.E. Indra Mani Pandey, undertook an official visit to Sri Lanka during 08-11 April 2024. This was his first official visit to Sri Lanka since taking charge as Secretary General on 04 January 2024.

During the visit, the Secretary General called on H.E. Ranil Wickremesinghe, President of Sri Lanka, Hon. M.U.M. Ali Sabry, PC., MP., Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, and Hon. Ramesh Pathirana, Minister of Health of Sri Lanka. The Secretary General also held meetings with the Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Aruni Wijewardane; Secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr. Anura Dissanayake; Secretary to the Ministry of Health, Dr. Palitha Maheepala; and the Secretary to the Ministry of Education, Mrs. Thilaka Jayasundara.

During his call on President Wickremesinghe, the Secretary General briefed the President on the state of progress in BIMSTEC since the 5th Summit that was held in Colombo in March 2022, and the expectations from the 6th Summit that is to be held in Bangkok. President Wickremesinghe reiterated Sri Lanka's commitment to BIMSTEC and shared Sri Lanka's priorities for regional cooperation.

Recalling his participation at the BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Retreat held in Bangkok in July 2023, Foreign Minister Ali Sabry stressed the importance of holding frequent and regular meetings at all levels of BIMSTEC to sustain momentum of regional cooperation and to ensure BIMSTEC's success so that the people of the Bay of Bengal region are able to reap the benefits of regional cooperation.



The Secretary General's meeting with the Secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr. Anura Dissanayake, was in the context of Sri Lanka being the lead member State for Human Resource Development. They held detailed discussion on taking forward cooperation within BIMSTEC on Human Resource Development, including the scheduling of the first meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Human Resource Development (HRD) that would consider the draft BIMSTEC Plan of Action on HRD.

The meeting with the Hon. Minister of Health and the Secretary to the Ministry of Health involved detailed discussions on the way forward in forging cooperation in the health sector within BIMSTEC including convening of the first meeting of BIMSTEC Health Ministers. Sri Lanka is the lead member State in the Health sector.

The meeting with the Secretary to the Ministry of Education involved discussions on the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility which is being set up in Colombo, Sri Lanka as well as convening of the first meeting of its Governing Board.

Apart from official meetings, the Secretary General participated in a public discussion organized by Kakshman Kadirgamar Institute (LKI) on the theme of 'Regional Cooperation through BIMSTEC', and in two roundtable discussion organized by the Advocata Institute and the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS). These events enabled the Secretary General to interact with a range of the Government Representative, experts, academics, thought leaders, researchers, and students, and listen to their views and ideas on regional cooperation. It also provided the Secretary General an opportunity to brief a wide range of persons on pursuit of regional cooperation through BIMSTEC.

The Secretary General's engagements with media in Sri Lanka also included an interview with The Sunday Morning newspaper and a TV interview on the Programme 'At Hyde Park' on Ada Derana.

The interview is available at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TF94xZ79hQ>



Secretary General at the 80th session of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)



Secretary General, H. E. Indra Mani Pandey, participated at the 80th Session of UNESCAP, which was held during 22-25 April 2024 in Bangkok, Thailand. He addressed the High-level Dialogue with sub-Regional Organizations on “Leveraging digital innovation for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific”. He also addressed the Side Event on “Leveraging Digital Innovation for Promoting Cross-Border Connectivity in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN) Subregion”. These four countries are member States of BIMSTEC.

During the visit, SG called on the Executive Secretary of UNESCAP, Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, and discussed various avenues for structured cooperation in future between the BIMSTEC and UNESCAP.

Besides, SG met with the following Dignitaries, on the sidelines of the UNESCAP Session, and discussed with them various ways of forging cooperation between the BIMSTEC and their respective regional/international organizations:

- H.E. Rabab Fatima, Under-Secretary-General, High Representative of United Nations for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS);
- H.E. Mr. Henry Puna, Secretary General, Pacific Islands Forum (PIF);
- H.E. Kairat Sarybay, Secretary General, Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA);
- H.E. Dr. Vinaya Prakash Singh, Secretary General, Asian-Pacific Postal Union (APPU);
- Ms. Fatima Yasmin, Vice-President (Sectors and Themes), Asian Development Bank (ADB);
- Ms. Atsuko Okuda, Regional Director, International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific;
- Mr. Marco Toscano-Rivalta, Chief of Office, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific;
- Ms. Alia El-YASSIR, Regional Director, UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific;
- Mr. Jonathan Gilman, Officer-in-Charge and Deputy Regional Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific;
- Mr. Greg Browder, Lead Water Resources Management Specialist, World Bank (WB);

SG's Remarks at 80th UNESCAP is available at: <https://youtu.be/CKgNNjACd5c>

UN Special Rapporteur meets with the Secretary General



Professor & Director, Centre for Environmental Law and UN Special Rapporteur on the right to development Mr. Surya Deva met with the Secretary General on 28 April 2024. They discussed ways of collaboration, especially how they can provide technical assistance to BIMSTEC member States regarding trade, investment & development, climate change etc.

1st Meeting of BIMSTEC Inter-governmental Expert Group on Mountain Economy



The First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Inter-governmental Expert Group on Mountain Economy (IEG-ME) was held from April 23-24, 2024 in Thimphu, Bhutan.

The Meeting was chaired by Mr. Tenzin Wangchuk, Chief Environment Officer, Climate Change Division, Department of Environment and Climate Change, Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Royal Government of Bhutan with participation of representatives from all BIMSTEC member States.

The Meeting finalized the Terms of Reference of IEG-ME, and the Concept Note and Plan of Action on BIMSTEC Mountain Economy. The Plan of Action outlines the following five priority areas:

1. Developing Compact Mountain Settlements;
2. Enhancing Mountain Connectivity;
3. Promoting Clean Renewable Energy;
4. Protecting Mountain Environments and Ensuring Ecosystem Services; and
5. Fostering Mountain Tourism and Green (agro and forest-based) enterprises.

Mountain Economy is a sub-sector under the Environment and Climate Change Sector with Bhutan as the lead country and the IEG-ME was established in 2023.



Role of BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee

The BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPWC) comprises National Focal Points at appropriate senior level of each BIMSTEC member State and it meets at least twice a year. The Committee also meets as and when necessary.

The BPWC , among others, deliberates on the administrative and financial matters of the Secretariat and BIMSTEC Centres/Entities; prepares, in consultation with the Secretariat, schedule/calendar of BIMSTEC activities; prioritizes and rationalizes BIMSTEC activities/projects; and prepares for the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting.

The BPWC reports to the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting and has held six regular and two special meetings to date.



3rd BPWC

Colombo, Sri Lanka, 01-02 March 2020



4th BPWC

Colombo, Sri Lanka, 31 August 2020



5th BPWC

Bangkok, Thailand, 13-15 September 2022



6th BPWC

Bangkok, Thailand, 01-02 February 2023

BIMSTEC SECRETARIAT

House No-N.W.(I)-06, Road No-53,
Gulshan-02, Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh

Tele : +880-2222290096-98, Fax : +880-2222287565

Email: info@bimstec.org, media@bimstec.org

Website : www.bimstec.org

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