



BIMSTEC

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

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Editorial



Welcome to our 6th monthly BIMSTEC e-Newsletter of 2024!

June 2024 was a momentous month for BIMSTEC, marking its 27th Foundation Day. In their messages marking the occasion, Leaders of the member States reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening regional cooperation through BIMSTEC.

I had the honour of audience with His Majesty The King of Bhutan, and calling on Honourable Prime Minister, Ministers, and Senior Officials of the Royal Government of Bhutan to discuss the current state of cooperation within the BIMSTEC framework and Bhutan's role in deepening regional cooperation.

The Eminent Persons' Group held its 4th Meeting, achieving significant progress in its work. The BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Human Trafficking finalized its Plan of Action in its 2nd meeting. The BIMSTEC Secretariat in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, organised capacity building programmes.

Marking a new beginning, Bangladesh organised BIMSTEC Consultation on Global Digital Compact. Continuing public outreach through media, I hosted members of the Diplomatic Correspondents Association of Bangladesh at the Secretariat.

We appreciate your continued readership and welcome your valuable suggestions on expanding and deepening regional cooperation through BIMSTEC.

(Indra Mani Pandey)
Secretary General

BIMSTEC Celebrates its 27th Anniversary



The Secretariat hosted a reception in Dhaka on 06 June 2024 to celebrate the foundation of BIMSTEC with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration, on 06 June 1997.

Chief Guest, H.E. Dr. Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, Bir Bikram, Adviser to Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Affairs, was joined by other Ministers, State Ministers, Secretaries, Ambassadors and High Commissioners, Heads of International Organizations, members of Diplomatic Corps, Officials of the Government of Bangladesh, media personnel, representatives of think tanks, members of the BIMSTEC Secretariat and others.

Welcoming the guests at the reception, Secretary General, H.E. Indra Mani Pandey, thanked the Chief Guest and other esteemed dignitaries and guests for their presence. He extended, on behalf of the Secretariat, greetings and felicitations to the Governments and People of the BIMSTEC member States. He highlighted the key achievements of BIMSTEC, since its establishment, and underscored the significance of the entry into force of the BIMSTEC Charter on 20th May 2024, which would provide the requisite impetus for expanding and deepening regional cooperation in the Bay of Bengal region and empower the BIMSTEC to engage with its external partners to foster mutually beneficial partnerships.

The Chief Guest, H.E. Dr. Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, spoke about the pioneering role of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh in establishing the BIMSTEC and hosting the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka. He expressed hope that the BIMSTEC would emerge as an effective and vibrant organization, capable of delivering and fulfilling the aspirations of the people of the region. He called upon the BIMSTEC member States and development partners to work together for the benefit of the people of the Bay of Bengal region.

Secretary General Pays Introductory Visit to Bhutan (10-14 June 2024)



Secretary General (SG) paid his introductory visit to Bhutan from 10-14 June, 2024. During the visit, SG was blessed by His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck with an audience. His Majesty assured SG of Bhutan's continued support to BIMSTEC. His Majesty the King also shared with SG his vision of Gelephu Mindfulness City who assured His Majesty of the support of BIMSTEC.

During the visit, SG was privileged to call on Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bhutan H.E. Dasho Tshering Tobgay. SG apprised Hon'ble Prime Minister of the current state of regional cooperation within the BIMSTEC framework. While reiterating Bhutan's commitment to enhancing regional cooperation, Hon'ble Prime Minister underscored the critical role that BIMSTEC can play in promoting growth and development in the Bay of Bengal region.

SG also called on Hon'ble Foreign Affairs and External Trade Minister(MoFAET), H.E. D.N. Dhungyel, and reviewed with him the progress in regional cooperation within the BIMSTEC, the way forward and the vital role of Bhutan in the success of the BIMSTEC. Hon'ble Minister reiterated Bhutan's commitment and reassured SG of Bhutan's full support to BIMSTEC and its Secretariat.

Besides, SG called on Hon'ble Energy and Natural Resources Minister, H.E. Gem Tshering, and discussed with him regional cooperation under BIMSTEC, particularly in the environment, climate change and energy sectors. He also met with the Energy and Natural Resources Secretary, H.E. Karma Tshering, and discussed in detail the prospect of regional cooperation in the above sectors.

SG was honoured to meet H.E. Lyonpo Namgyal Dorji, Minister for Industry, Commerce and Employment at the dinner hosted in his honour by H.E. Sudhakar Dalela, Ambassador of India to Bhutan.

During his calls-on and meetings, SG underscored the significance of the entry into force of the BIMSTEC Charter on 20 May 2024 which will provide impetus to expanding and deepening regional cooperation in the Bay of Bengal region. He highlighted the potential outcomes of the upcoming 6th BIMSTEC Summit and underlined the significance of the work of the BIMSTEC Eminent Persons' Group.

SG made a presentation on “Promoting Regional Cooperation through BIMSTEC” as part of MoFAET Lecture Series, in presence of Foreign Secretary H.E. Pema Choden, MoFAET officials both at the Headquarters and the Missions abroad, as well as other relevant officials from the Government.

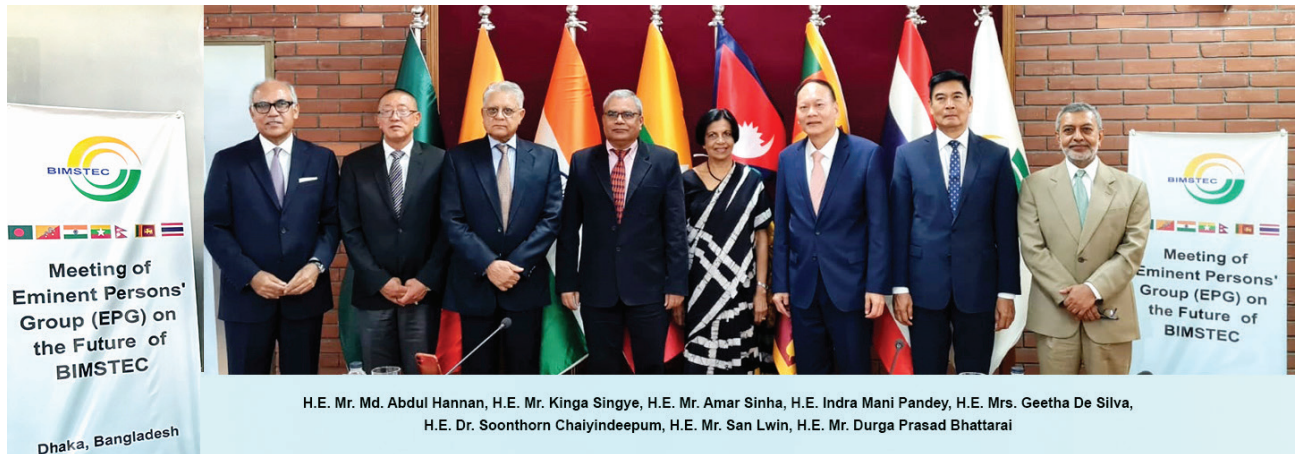
Besides official engagements, SG interacted with Bhutanese media and briefed them on his introductory visit to Bhutan and progress in regional cooperation under the BIMSTEC framework.

SG also attended the opening ceremony of the 4th Parliament of Bhutan and visited places of cultural and spiritual significance in Thimphu, Punakha and Paro.

Bhutan is one of the seven member States of BIMSTEC and leads regional cooperation in the Environment & Climate Change Sector and Mountain Economy Sub-sector of BIMSTEC. Bhutan joined the BIMSTEC in 2004.



4th Meeting of Eminent Persons' Group on Future Directions of BIMSTEC



The 4th Meeting of the Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) on Future Directions of the BIMSTEC was held on 25-27 June 2024 at the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The Meeting was chaired by Dr. Soonthorn Chaiyindeepum, member of the EPG from Thailand, which is the current Chair of the BIMSTEC. The members of EPG from all BIMSTEC member States joined the Meeting. The BIMSTEC Secretariat, led by H.E. Indra Mani Pandey, Secretary General, facilitated the Meeting and assisted the EPG in its deliberations.

During the three-day long Meeting, the EPG engaged in discussions on the current status of regional cooperation within the BIMSTEC and its institutional mechanisms. Furthermore, the EPG held interactions with the Ex-Secretary General of BIMSTEC, members of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks and the representatives of trade and business organizations of BIMSTEC member States.

The EPG has been entrusted with the task of providing guidance to the member States to reform, revitalize and repurpose the BIMSTEC. The establishment of the EPG signifies commitment of the BIMSTEC member States to take necessary steps to foster and deepen regional cooperation to realize the goals of a secure, developed and prosperous Bay of Bengal region. The EPG is committed to submit its Report to the BIMSTEC Leaders at the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit.

The 5th Meeting of the Eminent Persons' Group on Future Directions of BIMSTEC will be held from 16-18 July 2024; the first, second and third Meetings were held in Dhaka on 25 January 2024, 11-12 March 2024 and 12-13 May 2024 respectively.

Second Meeting of BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Human Trafficking



The National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force of the Government of Sri Lanka hosted the Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Human Trafficking in Colombo on 26-27 June 2024. The Meeting finalized the Plan of Action to combat Trafficking in Persons in the Bay of Bengal Region' with the objective to progressively prevent, suppress and punish all forms of trafficking in persons. It also discussed the way forward for cooperation in this field in future.

BIMSTEC Capacity Building on Design and management of Authorized Economic Operator Program



The Asian Development Bank (ADB) in collaboration with the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) of India and the BIMSTEC Secretariat organized a three-day capacity building program on the design and management of Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) programs from June 18 to 20, 2024 in New Delhi, India.

Customs officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand participated in the program. The training was led by senior officials from CBIC, India, who served as resource persons, sharing their extensive knowledge and experience on various aspects of AEO implementation in India.

The program featured interactive lecture sessions focusing on critical elements of AEO programs, including implementation strategies and the significance of Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs). These sessions provided participants with a robust understanding of how to establish and manage AEO programs effectively. Participants from each member States presented their own country status in the implementation of AEO programs, identifying bottlenecks and the way forward.

One of the highlights of the event was a field trip to the Delhi Customs Air Cargo Facility, where participants witnessed the AEO client management process in action. This hands-on experience allowed the customs officials to gain practical insights into the operational aspects of AEO management, enhancing their learning experience.

The program was aimed at enhancing the capacity of customs officials from BIMSTEC member States in the areas of international trade, trade facilitation and Mutual Recognition Arrangements.

Workshop on Financing of Transport Infrastructure Projects in BIMSTEC Region

The BIMSTEC Secretariat, in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), organized on 25 June 2024 a virtual Workshop on Financing of Transport Infrastructure Projects in BIMSTEC Region, Representatives of the BIMSTEC member States, the ADB and the BIMSTEC Secretariat attended the workshop.

The workshop aimed at raising awareness and enhancing the understanding of the “Study Report on Financing Transport Connectivity in the BIMSTEC Region” and the “BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity.”



The workshop reviewed the Action Plan outlined in the Study Report and discussed the possibilities for financing of the projects involving regional transport connectivity. ADB presented its recommendations on financing of transport infrastructure projects in the BIMSTEC region.

The deliberations of the workshop will be presented to the next Meeting of the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group for its consideration.

Knowledge sharing event on emerging infectious disease conditions and countries’ best practices in the BIMSTEC region, Tabletop Simulation Exercise and the Asia-Pacific Health Financing Forum



Sri Lanka, in collaboration with the World Bank, organized a knowledge sharing event on emerging infectious disease conditions and countries’ best practices in the BIMSTEC Region, Tabletop Simulation Exercise and the Asia-Pacific Health Financing Forum (APHFF) from 24-27 June 2024 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

During the event, participants from the BIMSTEC member States made their presentation on “Best practices and experiences in management of infectious diseases” in their respective countries followed by a discussion session. The participants were also invited to attend a session of APHFF on 27 June 2024 titled ‘Resilient Health Financing for Health Emergencies: Opportunities and Challenges (Financing of pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response (PPPR) and One Health)’.

The Tabletop Simulation Exercise was organized to improve performance, enhance skills for outbreaks and public health emergency preparedness and response of the participants from the BIMSTEC member States.

BIMSTEC Consultation on Global Digital Compact

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, in collaboration with the BIMSTEC Secretariat, organized a two-day BIMSTEC Regional Consultation on the Global Digital Compact (GDC) in Dhaka, on 22-23 June 2024. This was the first consultation amongst the BIMSTEC member States on the GDC.

The two-day consultation included five technical sessions where BIMSTEC member States discussed priorities concerning five key GDC objectives, leveraging the region's collaborations and efforts to ensure a secure digital environment, and promote sustainable technological advancement.



BIMSTEC Reaches Out to Public Through Media



Continuing his public outreach through media, Secretary General briefed and interacted with the members of the Diplomatic Correspondents Association of Bangladesh, seeking their help in creating public awareness about the goals and activities of BIMSTEC.

BIMSTEC External Relations

One of the purposes of BIMSTEC is to maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing International and Regional Organizations with similar aims and purposes. Article 24 of the BIMSTEC Charter on the conduct of external relations states :

“The BIMSTEC may conclude agreements with countries or sub-regional, regional and international organizations and institutions. The procedure for concluding such agreements shall be as laid down by the BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting”.

The Rules of Procedure for BIMSTEC’s External Relations was approved by the 19th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting held in Bangkok, Thailand on 09 March 2023. BIMSTEC has signed Memoranda of Understanding(MoUs) with the Asian Development Bank and the International Food Policy Research Institute in 2022 and 2023 respectively. A few additional MoUs with international and regional organizations are currently under consideration.



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