



# BIMSTEC

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

## BIMSTEC e-NEWSLETTER

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### Editorial



Welcome to our Last Monthly BIMSTEC E-Newsletter of 2024!

The Year 2024 witnessed remarkable progress in BIMSTEC's journey towards forging and expanding regional cooperation among its 7 member States, including engagements with its developmental partners and stakeholders and public outreach & diplomacy. We are pleased to share with you **Highlights of 2024**, outlining key developments.

The 24<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Senior Officials Meeting (SOM), which met virtually, made critical decisions pertaining to expanding regional cooperation in various sectors, underscoring the collective commitment of the member States to advancement of cooperation under the BIMSTEC framework. The 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Sub-Group on Narcotics Drugs, Psychotropic Substances, and Precursor Chemicals discussed the BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Drug Control and the BIMSTEC Annual Drug Report.

I had the privilege of representing BIMSTEC at the 29<sup>th</sup> Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Partnership Summit 2024 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of Purvodaya Perspectives "Reclaiming India's Maritime Heritage - Perspectives, Prospects, and Prognosis". I also had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Shahidur Rashid, Director for the South Asia Office, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), to discuss avenues for mutual cooperation.

As we continue our journey in 2025, I would like to reiterate that BIMSTEC remains committed to advancing multi-faceted regional cooperation in Bay of Bengal. We are looking forward to another year of progress in enhancing regional cooperation through a reformed and revitalized BIMSTEC.

We deeply value your readership and welcome your suggestions both to strengthen regional cooperation through BIMSTEC and to improve this E-Newsletter.

I wish you all a happy, prosperous and productive New Year 2025!

**(Indra Mani Pandey)**  
Secretary General

### IN THIS ISSUE

- Milestones;
- Sectoral Developments;
- Secretary General's Activities; and
- Other Engagements.

### Milestones

**Ambassador Indra Mani Pandey, a senior diplomat of India, assumes the charge of Secretary General (SG) of BIMSTEC on 04 January 2024.**



His Excellency Indra Mani Pandey is a career diplomat of India. He joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1990. He has served as Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations and Other International organizations in Geneva. He had earlier served as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs in-charge of Disarmament & International Security Affairs Division. During his 33 years long career as an Indian diplomat, Ambassador Pandey has served as Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman. Before his Ambassadorial assignment in Muscat, he served as Deputy Ambassador of India to France and Consul General of India at Guangzhou, China.

Ambassador Pandey is married to Mrs. Sushma Pandey and they have a daughter, Devangi.

### BIMSTEC Charter Enters into Force

The BIMSTEC Charter entered into force on 20 May 2024, granting the BIMSTEC a legal personality, which will provide impetus to expanding and deepening regional cooperation in Bay of Bengal region. The Charter was signed by the Heads of State and Government of the BIMSTEC member States during the 5<sup>th</sup> Summit held virtually, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 30 March 2022.

### Second BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Retreat

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Retreat of the Foreign Ministers of the BIMSTEC was held on 11-12 July 2024, in New Delhi, India. The Retreat was hosted by External Affairs Minister of India and it reviewed regional cooperation within the

BIMSTEC framework and discussed outcomes of the 6<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit.

### Inaugural Meeting of the BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers on the sidelines of 79<sup>th</sup> Session of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

The 1<sup>st</sup> Informal Meeting of BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers was held on 27 September 2024 in New York on the sidelines of 79<sup>th</sup> Session of UNGA. The Meeting was hosted by India and chaired by H.E. Dr. S. Jaishankar, Honourable

Minister of External Affairs of India. It provided the Ministers an opportunity to renew their commitment to continue the existing cooperation and identify new areas of cooperation within the BIMSTEC framework.

### The Eminent Persons' Group Concludes Its Work and Presents its Report



The Chair of EPG submitted the Report of the EPG to the Chair of the BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, H.E. Mr. Maris Sangiampongsa, during the 6<sup>th</sup> and final Meeting of EPG, held on 10-12 September 2024 at the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka, Bangladesh. A copy of the Report was also presented to the Secretary General of BIMSTEC. The Report will be submitted to BIMSTEC Leaders at their next Summit.

### Thailand Hosts Twenty Fourth BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting



Thailand hosted the 24<sup>th</sup> Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) on 19 December 2024 in virtual format. The Meeting was Chaired by H.E. Mr. Paisan Rupanichkij, Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, in its capacity as the current Chair of BIMSTEC. Secretary General and members of the BIMSTEC Secretariat also attended the Meeting.

The 24<sup>th</sup> Session of SOM approved the Budget of the Secretariat for 2025 and took other key decisions pertaining to expanding cooperation in various sectors, underscoring the collective commitment of the member States to advancement of regional cooperation under the BIMSTEC framework. During the Meeting, the member States provided comprehensive updates on the progress made by them in forging regional cooperation in the sectors and sub-sectors they lead. They also outlined their proposals for expanding regional cooperation within the BIMSTEC framework in future. The Session concluded with adoption of the Report of the 24<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC SOM, which will be submitted to the next BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, comprising Foreign Ministers of the member States.

The BIMSTEC SOM comprises Foreign Secretaries/Secretaries/Senior Officials from the member States and it meets annually before the Ministerial Meeting with special sessions held when necessary. The SOM, among others, prepares for the BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, coordinates implementation of agreements and decisions of the Ministerial Meeting and oversees the Permanent Working Committee's deliberation. The SOM reports to the BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting and has held twenty four meetings to date.

### BIMSTEC Secretariat Celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



The BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its establishment on 15 September 2024.

### BIMSTEC Celebrates its 27<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



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

## Sectoral Developments

### Environment and Climate Change

#### First Meeting of Inter-governmental Expert Group on Mountain Economy (IEG-ME)



The Meeting was held from April 23-24, 2024 in Thimphu, Bhutan. The Meeting finalized the ToR of IEG-ME, and the Concept Note and PoA on BIMSTEC Mountain Economy.

#### Third Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Maritime Security



The Meeting was held on 11 September 2024 in New Delhi, India. The Meeting finalized Draft BIMSTEC Guidelines for Maritime Components of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief.

#### Host Country Agreement for Establishment of BIMSTEC Energy Centre is Signed



The Host Country Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the BIMSTEC Secretariat for establishing the BIMSTEC Energy Centre (BEC) in Bengaluru was signed on 08 November 2024 in New Delhi.

#### Third Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Environment and Climate Change (JWG-ECC)



The Meeting was held on 28-29 November 2024 in Thimphu, Bhutan. The Meeting finalized the Action Matrix on BIMSTEC PoA on Environment and Climate Change and considered the Report of the 1st Meeting of the Inter-governmental

Expert Group on Mountain Economy.

### Agriculture and Food Security

#### The First Meeting of BIMSTEC Expert Group on Fisheries and Livestock (EGFL)



The Meeting was held virtually on 12 March 2024 in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. The Meeting finalized the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Expert Group on Fisheries and Livestock, and the Plan of Action (PoA) on BIMSTEC Fisheries and Livestock Cooperation.

### Security

#### Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs



The Meeting was held on 26 July 2024 in Myanmar. The Meeting discussed strategies to strengthen collective security and agreed on several collaborative initiatives.

### People-to-People Contact

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



The Meeting was held on 26-27 June 2024 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The Meeting finalized the PoA to combat Trafficking in Persons in the Bay of Bengal Region.

#### Second Meeting of BIMSTEC Expert Group on Tourism



The Meeting was held on 18 January 2024 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The Meeting finalized the updated draft Plan of Action on Tourism.

#### Eighth Meeting of BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in narcotic Drugs Psychotropic Substances and Precursor Chemicals (SG-NDPSPC)



The Meeting was held in New Delhi on 19-20 December 2024. The Meeting discussed the BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Drug Control and BIMSTEC Annual Drug Report and underscored the importance of strengthening inter-agency coordination & regional cooperation to combat illicit drug

trafficking and misuse.

#### Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Cultural Cooperation



The Meeting was held on 31 March 2024 in Lalitpur, Nepal. The Meeting finalized the Draft PoA on Culture and ToR of the Expert Group on Cultural Cooperation.

### Sectoral Developments Contd.....

#### People-to-People Contact...

##### Third Meeting of BIMSTEC Expert Group on Poverty Alleviation



The Meeting was held on 7-8 October 2024 in Dhulikhel, Nepal. The Meeting updated the 2012 BIMSTEC Poverty PoA and reviewed the Activity Matrix for implementation of PoA.

##### Fourth Meeting of BIMSTEC Expert Group on Visa Matters



The Meeting was held on 20–21 November 2024 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The Meeting decided to pursue BIMSTEC Visa Facilitation Scheme and agreed to conclude visa exemption agreements through bilateral mechanisms.

#### Science, Technology and Innovation

##### Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Cooperation



The Meeting was held on 25-26 July 2024 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The Meeting updated the BIMSTEC PoA on STI and finalized the Concept Note on organizing STI Forum and Boot Camps for Enabling STI Interventions, among others.

#### Science, Technology and Innovation...

##### First Meeting of BIMSTEC Expert Group on Human Resource Development



The Meeting was hosted by Sri Lanka virtually on 21-22 August 2024. The Meeting finalized the Draft ToR of the Expert Group and Draft BIMSTEC PoA on Human Resource Development (2024-2029).

##### Sixth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine



The Meeting held virtually on 28 November 2024, reviewed the implementation of activities under the Plan of Action for Development of Traditional Medicine finalized in 2020.

## Secretary General's Activities

### Secretary General Pays Introductory Visit to Member States in 2024



In 2024, Secretary General undertook key visits to member States to strengthen regional cooperation.

In Bangladesh, Secretary General met with Prime Minister H.E. Sheikh Hasina, to discuss BIMSTEC's achievements, the FTA, and the Secretariat's iconic building, with the Prime Minister reaffirming Bangladesh's commitment to regional cooperation and sustainable development. He also engaged with H.E. Ahasanul Islam (Titu), then State Minister for Commerce, on advancing trade and digital commerce under the FTA framework, and H.E. Masud Bin Momen, Foreign Secretary, on enhancing trade, connectivity, and security collaboration.

In Thailand, he engaged with H.E. Parnree Bahiddha-Nukara, Deputy Prime Minister, and Mr. Cherdchai Chaivaivid, Director General, on BIMSTEC leadership and the 6th Summit, and Mr. Montri Dechasakulsom, Deputy Permanent Secretary of Transport, on regional connectivity.

During his visit to India, he discussed trade, agriculture, energy, and cultural cooperation with H.E. Dr. S. Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister, and H.E. Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Health Minister.

In Sri Lanka, his meeting with President H.E. Ranil Wickremesinghe emphasized health, education, and human resource development.

In Nepal, he held discussions with President H.E. Ramchandra Paudel and Prime Minister H.E. Pushpa Kamal Dahal on linking the Himalayan and Bay of Bengal ecosystems and delivered a keynote at Tribhuvan University.

In Bhutan, he met His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and Prime Minister H.E. Dasho Tshering Tobgay, focusing on Bhutan's role in climate change, energy, and environment.

Finally, in Myanmar, he participated in the 4<sup>th</sup> National Security Chiefs' meeting and met H.E. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, H.E. Admiral Moe Aung, and others to discuss security, food security, and connectivity.

### Secretary General's Activities Contd...

#### Secretary General Visits to BIMSTEC Centres



Secretary General visited the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate at the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting in NOIDA, India on 08 March 2024 and the "BIMSTEC Energy Centre" in Bengaluru, India, on 09-10 May 2024.

#### External Relations Call-Ons/others

##### Secretary-General called on Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh



Secretary-General called on H. E. Sheikh Hasina, Honourable Prime Minister of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh at the latter's Office on 13 February 2024.

##### Secretary General called on Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh



Secretary General called on Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, H.E. Mr. Masud Bin Momen, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka on 09 January 2024.

##### Secretary General called on Honourable Foreign Minister of Bangladesh



Secretary General called on H.E. Dr. Hasan Mahmud, M.P., Honourable Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, on 30 January 2024.

##### Director for South Asia, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) called on the Secretary General



Dr. Shahidur Rashid, Director for South Asia, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) based in New Delhi called on the Secretary General at the BIMSTEC Secretariat on 25 February 2024. They discussed and agreed to collaborate on specific areas of cooperation for the benefit of the BIMSTEC region.

##### Secretary General called on Honourable State Minister for Commerce of Bangladesh



Secretary General called on H.E. Ahasanul Islam (Titu), MP, Honourable State Minister for Commerce of Bangladesh on 05 February 2024 at the latter's office in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

##### Director of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP-SSWA) met Secretary General



Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Director/Head of South and South-West Asia Office, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP-SSWA) based in New Delhi, India, met Secretary General at the BIMSTEC Secretariat on March 18, 2024.

##### India Foundation hosted an interaction



The India Foundation hosted an interaction with Secretary General on May 10, 2024.

##### Secretary General met with Director General of World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)



Secretary General met with H.E. Darren Tang, Director General of World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in New York on 23 September 2024.

##### Secretary General met with Director General of World Health Organization (WHO)



Secretary General met with Director General of World Health Organization (WHO), H.E. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at United Nations in New York on 26 September 2024.

##### Secretary General met with Secretary General of United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD)



Secretary General met with Secretary General of United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) H.E. Rebeca Grynspan at United Nations in New York on 26 September 2024.

### Secretary General's Activities Contd...

#### Secretary General met with Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)



Secretary General met with Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), H.E. Doreen Bogdan-Martin, at United Nations on 26 September 2024.

#### Secretary General met with Dr. P. Chandra Shekara, new Director General of CIRDP



Secretary General met with Dr. P. Chandra Shekara, new Director General of Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP).

#### Secretary General met with Deputy Secretary General of ASEAN



Secretary General met with Deputy Secretary General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for Political-Security Community, H.E. Dato' Astanah Abdul Azizin, at United Nations in New York on 25 September 2024.

#### Secretary General received Regional Representative of UNODC



Secretary General received H.E. Marco Teixeira, Regional Representative of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Regional Office for South Asia on 09 September 2024.

#### Secretary General met with ASG and UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific



Secretary General met with H.E. Ms. Kanni Wignaraja, ASG and UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, on 25 September 2024 at United Nations in New York.

#### Secretary General calls on Hon'ble Chief Advisor of Interim Government of Bangladesh



Secretary General called on H. E. Dr. Mohammad Yunus, Hon'ble Chief Advisor of the Interim Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on 28 October 2024.

#### Secretary General met with Under Secretary General of United Nations and UNSG's Envoy on Technology



Secretary General met with Under Secretary General of United Nations and UNSG's Envoy on Technology, H.E. Amandeep S Gill, a member of IFS Family, in New York at the United Nations on 27 September 2024.

#### Secretary General attended the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the Raisina Dialogue 2024



Secretary General attended the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the Raisina Dialogue 2024 which was held in New Delhi, India from 21-23 February 2024.

#### Secretary General called on Hon'ble Foreign Affairs Adviser of Bangladesh



Secretary General, BIMSTEC called on Hon'ble Foreign Affairs Adviser of Bangladesh, Md. Touhid Hossain on 09 September 2024.

#### Secretary General attended the 7<sup>th</sup> Indian Ocean Conference 2024



Secretary General attended the 7<sup>th</sup> Indian Ocean Conference 2024 held from 09-10 February in Perth, Australia and also participated as a Panelist at the Panel Discussion on

Strengthening ties in the Indian Ocean: How can we better facilitate cooperation through regional architecture, between Indian Ocean countries?

### Secretary General's Activities Contd..

#### Secretary General participated at "Jakarta Futures Forum: Blue Horizon, Green Growth"



Jakarta, Indonesia, on 02-03 May 2024.

Secretary General participated at "Jakarta Futures Forum: Blue Horizon, Green Growth" organized by Observer Research Foundation and Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia, with the support of Embassy of India, in

#### Secretary General attended the 29<sup>th</sup> Confederation of Indian Industry(CII) Partnership Summit 2024



Secretary General attended the 29<sup>th</sup> Confederation of Indian Industry(CII) Partnership Summit 2024 on 2-3 December 2024 in New Delhi, India. He highlighted BIMSTEC's vital role in advancing South-South cooperation at the Summit.

#### Secretary General delivered Plenary Address at the 4<sup>th</sup> Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue



Regional Governance and Cooperation".

Secretary General delivered Plenary Address at the 4<sup>th</sup> Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue held on 07-08 May 2024 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, organized by Pathfinder Foundation and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. He was also a Lead Speaker at the Panel Discussion on "Harmonising

#### Secretary General attended 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Purvodaya Perspectives themed "Reclaiming India's Maritime Heritage - Perspectives, Prospects, and Prognosis"



Secretary General attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Purvodaya Perspectives, themed "Reclaiming India's Maritime Heritage - Perspectives, Prospects, and Prognosis" was held in Bhubaneswar, Odisha on 14-15 December 2024.

#### Secretary General participated at the "Second Edition of Raisina Down Under 2024"



External Affairs of India and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia.

Secretary General participated at the "Second Edition of Raisina Down Under 2024", on 05-06 November, 2024 in Canberra, Australia. The conference was organized by Observer Research Foundation and Australian Strategic Policy Institute, with the support of Ministry of

#### Secretary General participated at the 80<sup>th</sup> Session of UNESCAP



Secretary General participated at the 80<sup>th</sup> 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.

## Other Engagements

#### BIMSTEC Business Summit



mountain and digital economies; services sector; and women-led development.

The inaugural BIMSTEC Business Summit was held from 06-08 August 2024, in New Delhi, India. The Summit focused on key facets of regional trade, including technology transfer; Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises; blue,

#### Policy Implementation Workshop on Climate Change and Humanitarian Assistance (HA)/ Disaster Relief(DR) in the Bay of Bengal



BIMSTEC in collaboration with the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue(HD), organized a Policy Implementation Workshop on Climate Change and Humanitarian Assistance(HA)/Disaster Relief(DR) in the Bay of Bengal on 24-25 October, 2024 in Bangkok, Thailand.

#### BIMSTEC Regional Consultation



member States on the GDC.

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

#### First Exchange Programme for the Faculties of the Foreign Service Academies of the BIMSTEC member States



Representatives from Foreign Service Academies/Institutes of all BIMSTEC member States attended the programme.

#### Workshop on Cross-border Transmission Lines Optimization of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Masterplan



Dhaka, Bangladesh. Officials from all BIMSTEC member States participated in the workshop.

The BIMSTEC Secretariat in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank organized a Workshop on Cross-border Transmission Lines Optimization of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Masterplan on 18-19 February 2024 in

The 1<sup>st</sup> Exchange Programme for the Faculties of the Foreign Service Academies of the BIMSTEC member States was held on 03-07 March 2024 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.



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