



Message from Secretary General

Welcome to the 12th and last Edition of 2025 of Monthly BIMSTEC ENewsletter!

The month of December 2025 witnessed a series of focused sectoral meetings and strategic engagements with external partners, reflecting steady progress being made in forging regional cooperation across various sectors on BIMSTEC's Agenda in line with its commitment to advancing its vision of a Prosperous, Resilient, and Open BIMSTEC.

While the 3rd Meeting of the BIMSTEC Working Group on Customs Cooperation advanced deliberations on the draft Agreement on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in Customs Matters, a key instrument supporting the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area, in Agriculture and Food Security sector the 2nd Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Fisheries and Livestock reviewed implementation of the Plan of Action, underscoring efforts to strengthen food security and sustainable livelihoods.

Engagements with regional and international partners further reinforced BIMSTEC's endeavours to reach out aimed at forging developmental partnerships. At the Delivering for Nutrition in South Asia (D4N) Conference 2025, the importance of regional cooperation in strengthening food systems for the region's 1.8 billion people was highlighted.

My visit to the BIMSTEC Energy Centre in Bengaluru reaffirmed BIMSTEC's pivotal role in advancing regional energy cooperation, including cooperation in grid interconnection, energy efficiency and renewable energy. With the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, we reaffirmed the resolve of the two organisations to enhance collaboration in dealing with transnational crimes, including drug and human trafficking.

Through a video message at the workshop on "Governing Artificial Intelligence for People, Planet and Progress", we highlighted BIMSTEC's commitment to developing a regional regulatory approach that ensures AI is harnessed responsibly and ethically to support sustainable development.

This Edition also features a brief snapshot on the progress in cooperation under BIMSTEC in Agriculture and Food Security sector, underscoring its critical role in advancing food security and sustainable development in the region.

We highly value your readership and welcome your suggestions on strengthening regional cooperation under BIMSTEC and improving our ENewsletter.

I wish you all a happy, prosperous and productive New Year 2026!

Indra Mani Pandey
Secretary General

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In Focus: BIMSTEC Sectoral Meetings

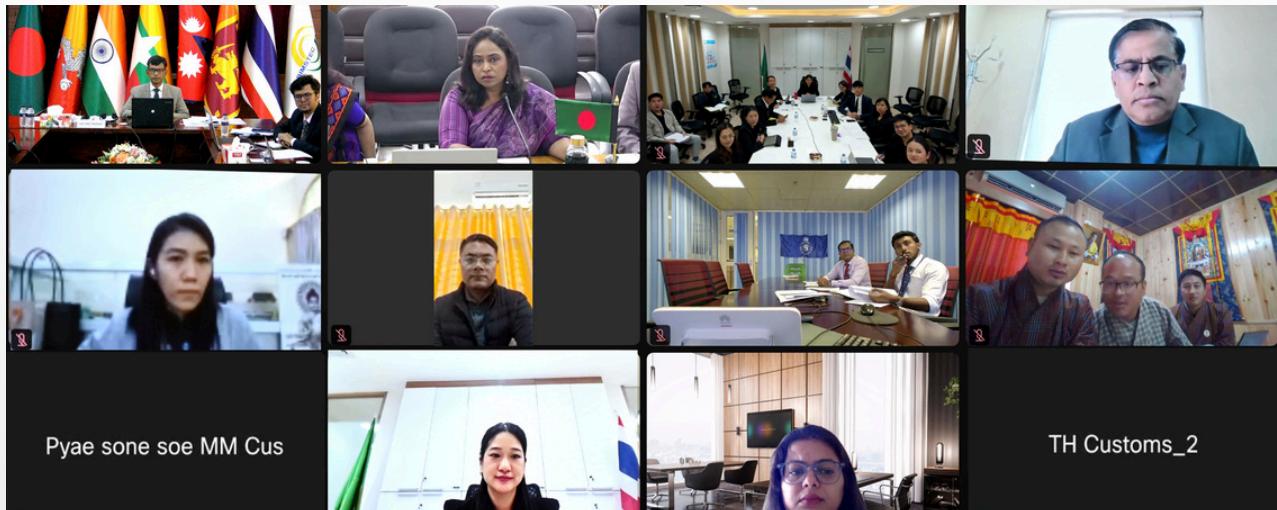
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Season's Greetings



BIMSTEC Working Group on Customs Cooperation holds its 3rd Meeting

The 3rd Meeting of the BIMSTEC Working Group on Customs Cooperation was held virtually on 02 December 2025. The member States negotiated and updated the draft text of the Agreement on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in Customs Matters for the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area, with a view to finalize it soon.



2nd Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group of Fisheries and Livestock

The 2nd Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group of Fisheries and Livestock was held on 08-09 December 2025, in virtual mode. Hosted by Nepal, the Meeting discussed implementation of the Plan of Action and other key initiatives for development of fisheries and livestock sector, including establishment of BIMSTEC Center of Excellence in Livestock; creation of a network of fisheries and livestock research and development institutions; exchange programmes among fisheries and livestock departments and research institutes; and forging partnership with relevant International Organisations.

BIMSTEC Secretary General addresses "Delivering for Nutrition in South Asia (D4N) Conference 2025" through a video message



The BIMSTEC Secretary General, H.E. Indra Mani Pandey delivered a video message at the Closing Plenary of the "Delivering for Nutrition in South Asia (D4N) Conference 2025" held from December 2-4, 2025, in Kathmandu. He underscored the critical role of regional cooperation in advancing nutrition and food systems, and highlighted BIMSTEC's priority areas in Agriculture and Food Security, including the proposal for establishment of a BIMSTEC Food Reserve.

BIMSTEC Secretary General Meets UNODC Regional Representative



The BIMSTEC Secretary General, H.E. Indra Mani Pandey, received Mr. Kristian Hoelge, Regional Representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) – South Asia, at the BIMSTEC Secretariat on 08 December 2025. The meeting discussed potential areas of mutual cooperation in combating transnational crimes, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, cybercrime, and money laundering.

BIMSTEC Secretary General Visits BIMSTEC Energy Centre



The BIMSTEC Secretary General (SG) H.E. Indra Mani Pandey visited the BIMSTEC Energy Centre (BEC) in Bengaluru, India, on 11 December 2025. The BEC team briefed SG on its ongoing activities and future plans. SG reaffirmed the BIMSTEC Secretariat's support to BEC and highlighted its crucial role in promoting regional cooperation in the energy sector including technical assistance, capacity building and undertaking projects aimed at interconnection of power grids, energy efficiency, renewable energy, etc. enabling transition to green energy by the member States.

BIMSTEC Secretary General Addresses Workshop on Governing AI for People, Planet and Progress



The BIMSTEC Secretary General, H.E. Indra Mani Pandey, delivered a video message at the workshop titled 'Governing Artificial Intelligence for People, Planet and Progress: AI Sovereignty and International Law', hosted by the Centre for International Law, National University of Singapore, on 12 December 2025. The message underscored the need for a regional regulatory framework aligned with the Global Digital Compact and reaffirmed BIMSTEC's commitment to strengthening digital public infrastructure and leveraging the transformative potential of AI across all areas of BIMSTEC cooperation.

BIMSTEC Secretary General Addresses Webinar on "Securing Beyond Borders: Strengthening BIMSTEC's Role in Countering Non-Traditional Threats



The BIMSTEC Secretary General H.E. Indra Mani Pandey delivered the keynote address at the webinar titled "Security Beyond Borders: Strengthening BIMSTEC's Role in Countering Non-Traditional Threats", hosted by Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE) and the South Asia Sustainability and Security Research Institute (SASSRI) of Sri Lanka. In his address, he emphasised complex, transnational and non-traditional threats that necessitate collective action and coordinated regional responses. Highlighting Security as a priority sector, he mentioned BIMSTEC's progress, including the Convention on Combating Terrorism, the proposed Home Ministers' Meeting, and new guidelines for maritime and cyber security.

BIMSTEC Secretary General delivered an insightful talk at the Asia Centre in Bangalore

The BIMSTEC Secretary General H.E. Indra Mani Pandey delivered a talk at the Asia Centre in Bangalore on 12 December 2025. Focusing on "BIMSTEC: A Strategic Platform for Regional Cooperation in Bay of Bengal," Secretary General provided an overview of the organization's significant achievements, strategic importance, and key priority sectors, underlining the region's vast potential for collaboration.

Building sustainable agricultural development towards regional food security: BIMSTEC's Progress in Agriculture and Food Security Sector



The Bay of Bengal region is renowned for its abundant agricultural diversity, varied climates and diverse landscapes. Agriculture serves as a fundamental source of employment across the BIMSTEC member States and plays a vital role in shaping the region's economy. Recognizing the salience of agriculture and allied sectors for sustainable development and regional food security, Agriculture and food Security, together with fisheries and livestock, have constituted key priority sectors for regional cooperation, under BIMSTEC. Myanmar is the Lead Country for the coordination of activities in the Agriculture and Food Security Sector.

The Expert Group on Agricultural Cooperation (EGAC) was established in 2007, as the primary institutional mechanism to deliberate the future course of regional cooperation in agriculture. The Meeting of Expert Group on Agricultural Cooperation is being held at reasonable intervals and so far, the Expert Group has met eleven times. BIMSTEC also established the Expert Group on Fisheries and Livestock in 2022 to enhance regional cooperation in fisheries and livestock sector.

To guide regional cooperation in agriculture and allied sectors, the Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM-A) and the BIMSTEC Agriculture Ministerial Meeting (BAMM) were institutionalized in 2019. The 3rd BIMSTEC Agriculture Ministerial Meeting, preceded by the 3rd Senior Officials' Meeting on Agriculture, was held on 08-09 April 2025 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

BIMSTEC has made considerable progress in fostering regional cooperation in agriculture and allied sectors. It has adopted a Plan of Action on Strengthening BIMSTEC Agricultural Cooperation and a Plan of Action on Fisheries and Livestock Cooperation, which serve as a guiding document for member States and external partners to initiate and implement relevant projects and programs. As part of the implementation of activities pertaining to the above Plans of Action, member States have conducted Seminar, workshops, training and capacity building programmes to strengthen cooperation among member States.

Apart from implementation of the above Plans of Action, a number of significant proposals for regional cooperation in Agriculture Sector are currently under consideration of member States such as establishment of BIMSTEC Food Reserve; creation of a BIMSTEC Seed Bank; promotion of regional trade in agricultural commodities and creation of a Sub-group under Expert Group of Agricultural Cooperation on Intra-regional Agricultural Trade.

Further, Bangladesh has taken initiative to establish BIMSTEC Center of Excellence in Livestock, while India has offered to establish BIMSTEC Center of Excellence in Agriculture, which will anchor regional cooperation in agriculture and allied Sectors. India also offers fully funded BIMSTEC Agricultural Scholarships for students from BIMSTEC member nations to pursue M.Sc. and Ph.D. in India. In addition, BIMSTEC Network of Agricultural Research and Development Institutions has been established in order to facilitate exchange of knowledge, best practices and technologies developed by each institution of the member States.

In pursuit of maintaining close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations, BIMSTEC Secretariat and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 05 March 2023 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. This partnership with IFPRI has already resulted in a range of training programmes and capacity building workshops. Moreover, five BIMSTEC member States – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Thailand – have been included, together with two ASEAN member States – The Philippines and Vietnam – in the Project entitled Agricultural Transformation and Market Integration Phase II (ATMI-II), jointly implemented by IFPRI; International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture.

Given the shared vulnerabilities and challenges of climate change, natural disasters, agricultural trade and market integration, BIMSTEC remains committed to strengthening regional collaboration to transform the agriculture, fisheries and livestock sector into a more sustainable, productive and resilient agricultural systems. With implementation of aforesaid Plans of Action, a strong institutional framework and growing partnership with international and regional organizations, BIMSTEC is advancing towards the goal of food and nutrition security in the Bay of Bengal region.

Building sustainable agricultural development towards regional food security: BIMSTEC's Progress in Agriculture and Food Security Sector Contd.....

Key Achievements at a Glance

- Adoption of the Plan of Action on Strengthening BIMSTEC Agricultural Cooperation and BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Fisheries and Livestock Cooperation.
- Three Agriculture Ministers Meeting held; Expert Group established on Fisheries and Livestock Cooperation; establishment of the BIMSTEC Network of Agricultural R & D Institutions and BIMSTEC Agricultural Scholarships funded by India.
- Initiative to establish BIMSTEC Food Reserve; creation of a Sub-group under Expert Group of Agricultural Cooperation on Intra-regional Agricultural Trade; BIMSTEC Seed Bank.
- Memorandum of Understanding between the BIMSTEC Secretariat and IFPRI signed and involved in Agricultural Transformation and Market Integration Project – Phase II.
- BIMSTEC Center of Excellence in Agriculture and Center of Excellence in Livestock to be established in India and Bangladesh respectively.





**BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL
TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION**

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