



## Message from Secretary General

Greetings and best wishes for a Happy New Year 2026!

Welcome to 1<sup>st</sup> edition of 2026 of our Monthly BIMSTEC E-Newsletter!

The beginning of 2026 marked significant progress in BIMSTEC's endeavours towards regional cooperation in environment, climate change, and energy sectors, reinforcing the need for regional cooperation in addressing climate risks and energy security challenges.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Environment and Climate Change (JWG-ECC) strengthened the institutional foundation by finalizing the Group's Terms of Reference, reviewing implementation of the BIMSTEC Plan of Action and advancing discussions on climate finance mobilization and other priority initiatives.

Capacity development continued as a core priority of regional cooperation under BIMSTEC. The Training and Capacity Building Programme on Global and Regional Issues organised by RIS facilitated informed dialogue among the Member States on evolving economic challenges, while the three-day online training on Climate-Smart Agriculture focused on enhancing technical and institutional capacities to support adaptation and mitigation efforts at national level.

At the 4<sup>th</sup> Bay of Bengal Economic Dialogue and the India Energy Week in Goa, BIMSTEC's engagement underscored the strategic rationale for regional cooperation in navigating global geopolitical uncertainties. Emphasis was placed on collective action to achieve Sustainable Development Goals, address the energy transition needs of Global South and promote green and sustainable energy pathways that balance growth and resilience and reduced carbon intensity.

This edition also features a brief snapshot of progress in cooperation in fields of Tourism and Culture under BIMSTEC, highlighting the efforts to strengthen people-to-people ties and promote sustainable development across the region.

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

**Indra Mani Pandey**  
Secretary General

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## 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Environment and Climate Change



The 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Environment and Climate Change (JWG-ECC) was held on 15–16 January 2026 in Thimphu, Bhutan. It finalized the Terms of Reference of the JWG-ECC, reviewed activities under the Action Matrix of the BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Environment and Climate Change, discussed mobilization of climate finance and explored initiatives to make progress in regional cooperation in Environment and Climate Change Sector, which is led by Bhutan.

## Training and Capacity Building Programme on Global and Regional Issues for BIMSTEC member States



The Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), in collaboration with BIMSTEC Secretariat, organised a two-day "Training and Capacity Building Programme on Global and Regional Issues for BIMSTEC Countries" on 13-14 January 2026 in New Delhi. 76 Participants across BIMSTEC member States attended the programme in hybrid mode. The objective of this training programme was to enhance knowledge and foster common understanding among countries within Bay of Bengal region on key contemporary global and regional economic issues.

## Training on Climate Smart Agriculture for Adaptation and Mitigation



A three-day online Training Programme on Climate-Smart Agriculture for Adaptation and Mitigation was conducted from 27–29 January 2026.

Organised by Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, in collaboration with Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Agriculture of Bangladesh, it focused on strengthening the technical and institutional capacities of key stakeholders in the member States to plan and implement Climate-Smart Agriculture practices. It brought together over 40 participants from the BIMSTEC Member States.

## BIMSTEC Secretary General addressed the Bay of Bengal Economic Dialogue at New Delhi, India



BIMSTEC Secretary General, H.E. Indra Mani Pandey addressed the 4<sup>th</sup> Bay of Bengal Economic Dialogue organized by Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2026 in New Delhi, India. He emphasized the need for regional cooperation to navigate global uncertainties and highlighted that collective action is vital for realizing the SDGs and building a resilient, prosperous Bay of Bengal region.

## BIMSTEC Secretary General attends India Energy Week 2026 in Goa, India



Speaking at a Ministerial panel discussion on "Global South Clean Energy Solidarity: Powering South-South Cooperation for a Shared Future" during India Energy Week 2026, BIMSTEC Secretary General underscored the critical role of regional cooperation through organisations like BIMSTEC in advancing the goals of meeting growing energy needs of Global South countries while reducing their carbon footprint and transitioning to green and sustainable energy

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## Global South seeks to take energy transition deep into their nations

Access to capital and technology, and driving long-term policy consistency could be the key elements of the change

**“** Our energy sector is at the heart of our aspirations. It holds 500 billion dollars in investment opportunities, that's why, Make in India, Innovate in India, Scale with India, Invest in India.

**Narendra Modi**, Prime Minister

**“** India's rapid expansion of LPG coverage, clean cooking access and diversified energy mix reflect the country's commitment to inclusive growth and equitable energy access.

**HARDEEP SINGH PURI**, Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas

**C**ooperation around clean energy is driving the South-South Cooperation (SSC) that could help countries reduce the impact footprint and going down their transition path. India's leadership in clean energy is showing the way for various countries.

At India Energy Week's conversation on Global South's clean energy solidarity, members of SSC made a strong case for enhancing cooperation, using technology to drive benefits and spreading the use of renewable power. Ultimately, if energy becomes more affordable, it could help these nations grow faster.

Several examples of the cooperation are already unfolding. Indian power grids are already connected with Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan to meet their unique needs. The next step that India is working on is to connect the grids of Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand. This cooperation makes for sound economic sense since Bhutan has surplus hydropower, while Nepal has the potential for harness its hydropower further. The extended grids could make sure that the cooperation can be spread across renewable energy between these nations.

"It is wonderful to work with regional organisations to enhance the SSC among the countries that need it," said Indra Mani Pandey, Secretary General, BIMSTEC.

Several instances of cooperation various aspects of energy is already being driven across nations. Brazil and India have intensified collaboration on biofuels, sharing knowledge on deepwater oil/gas exploration alongside sustainable energy transitions. India's UUALA programme for energy efficiency is of interest across several countries. India's experience of building a grid scale digital network for renewable power has caught interest among nations. Countries are also looking at various options on what could drive their just energy transition.

The best practices are being shared among countries too. With over 130 GW of installed solar capacity, India is also looking to extend the cooperation being made under the aegis of International Solar Alliance (ISA) to drive the cooperation around solar energy. SSC countries see that as a strong option.

A nation which has been devastated by war, Sudan is considering rebuilding its energy systems and clean energy could be the way ahead. "We have to rebuild the energy sector in collaboration with partners. We must enhance the SSC for that so that we can enhance our resilience," Prof. Elmutalim Ibrahim Ahmed Ali, Minister of Energy and Petroleum, Sudan said.

Countries will need to lower the costs so that availability and affordability can be improved. For example, countries which have several islands as part of their geographical spread, need to find ways of handling resilience.

"We are also looking to incentivise the private sector to develop the energy systems of the future," Ralph Regenvanu, Minister for Climate Change Adaptation, Vanuatu, which faces unique challenges for which a more cooperative approach can help find solutions.

These countries want access to capital for their energy transition, seek access to technology to drive the change, and will need their institutions to drive the consistency for their transition.

South-South Cooperation (SSC) is an agglomeration of 134 countries that works closely with the United Nations. These nations engage in knowledge, technology, and resource sharing to achieve sustainable development and indulge in collective negotiations. Countries also share their development experiences, technologies, and solutions, often facing similar development pathways.

# Advancing Tourism and Cultural Cooperation for strengthening People-to-People Contact and Sustainable Development: BIMSTEC's Progress in Tourism and Culture



The Bay of Bengal region is endowed with exceptional natural beauty, civilizational linkages, shared cultural heritages with remarkable diversity. Tourism and cultural exchange occupy a central place in fostering people-to-people connectivity, mutual understanding and inclusive growth among the BIMSTEC Member States. Recognizing the transformative potential of tourism and culture as drivers of sustainable development, employment generation and regional identity, BIMSTEC has accorded high priority to strengthening cooperation in these two closely interlinked sectors.

Tourism has remained a core area of cooperation since the establishment of BIMSTEC. In line with Summit directives and the reconstituted sectoral architecture under the BIMSTEC Charter, Tourism and Culture are today firmly positioned under the People-to-People Contact sector, reflecting their strategic importance in building an open, people-centred and resilient BIMSTEC community. Nepal serves as lead member state for this sector.

Institutionally, BIMSTEC tourism cooperation is institutionalized by the periodic meetings of BIMSTEC Working Group on Tourism, which serves as the foundational platform for advancing regional tourism initiatives, reviewing progress and identifying new areas of collaboration. This has been reinforced by the periodic meetings of the BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators, a mechanism consisting of public and private tourism organizations. To provide high-level policy direction, BIMSTEC Tourism Ministerial processes have been institutionalized, reinforcing the political commitment of Member States to deepen tourism cooperation.

To guide structured implementation, BIMSTEC has adopted dedicated Plans of Action on Tourism and on Culture, which serve as comprehensive blueprints for regional cooperation. These Plans of Action provide the framework for Member States and the Secretariat to

initiate concrete activities covering thematic tourism development, cultural heritage protection, digital initiatives, capacity-building programmes, cultural promotion events and external partnerships etc.

Under the tourism track, BIMSTEC has made steady progress in conceptualizing and advancing flagship thematic tourism circuits, including the BIMSTEC Buddhist Circuit, Temple Circuit, Adventure circuits, Cruise Circuits and Eco-Tourism Circuit, capitalizing on the region's shared heritage, biodiversity and spiritual traditions. These initiatives aim to position the Bay of Bengal region as an integrated, multi-destination tourism space, while promoting sustainable tourism, local livelihoods and cultural preservation. BIMSTEC has also prioritized the development of tourism promotion mechanisms, engagement with tour operators, organization of tourism events and exploration of digital tourism platforms to enhance visibility and information sharing across the region.

Cultural cooperation under BIMSTEC is anchored in a robust institutional framework. The Expert Group level meets periodically to discuss various initiatives, review progress and deliberate plans of action. Building upon it, the Senior Officials and Ministerial mechanisms have steered cooperation forward in heritage, cultural exchanges, creative economy and cultural promotion etc.

The establishment of the BCIC and the ongoing operationalization of the BCIO represent landmark institutional developments, aimed at creating a regional hub for research, data, policy support and promotion of cultural industries. Among the flagship initiatives under this track are the proposed Digital Inventory of BIMSTEC Cultural Heritage, development of a BIMSTEC cultural web platform, promotion of regional cultural festivals and film initiatives, and structured programmes for safeguarding both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

BIMSTEC has also been pursuing partnerships with international and regional organizations to enhance technical depth and implementation capacity in tourism and culture. Such partnerships are aimed at shaping BIMSTEC's outward-looking approach, positioning tourism and culture as platforms for global collaboration.

## Advancing Tourism and Cultural Cooperation for strengthening People-to-People Contact and Sustainable Development: BIMSTEC's Progress in Tourism and Culture Contd...

Looking ahead, BIMSTEC remains firmly committed to accelerating implementation of its Plans of Action, operationalizing the BCIO, establishing thematic tourism circuits and strengthening synergies between tourism, culture, digital initiatives and visa facilitation. In line with the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit Declaration and the BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030, tourism and cultural cooperation would play a pivotal role in building an open and people-centred BIMSTEC, fostering sustainable tourism, safeguarding cultural heritages, promoting cultural industries and enhancing people-to-people ties across the Bay of Bengal region.

### **Key Achievements at a Glance**

- Strengthening of cooperation in the tourism and culture sector through periodic meetings of the BIMSTEC Working Group on Tourism and the Expert Group on Cultural Cooperation, as well as Senior Officials and Ministerial level meetings.
- Finalization of the BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Tourism and BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Culture, providing structured roadmaps for cooperation among the member states.
- Initiatives to advance flagship tourism initiatives, including through the establishment of BIMSTEC Buddhist Circuit, Temple Circuit, Eco-Tourism Circuit, Adventure circuits, Cruise Circuits by designating lead member states and Ad-hoc committees.
- Signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) and the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO), providing the formal legal foundation for promoting regional cooperation on cultural industries as agreed by the Paro Initiative.
- Establishment of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) and initiatives underway towards operationalizing BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO) in Bhutan.
- Establishment of Tourism Information Centre in New Delhi and BIMSTEC Tourism Development Fund.
- Announcement by Nepal to establish BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence on Culture and Tourism.
- Reinforced Summit-level mandates under the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit and BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030 positioning tourism and culture as pillars of people-to-people connectivity and an open BIMSTEC community.



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

**BIMSTEC SECRETARIAT**

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