



Message from BIMSTEC Secretary General

Welcome to 3rd edition of our Monthly BIMSTEC E-Newsletter for the year 2026.

Amidst the unprecedented global crisis, impacting adversely the global economies, there is a growing sentiment that regional cooperation has become a necessity and not a choice. BIMSTEC is therefore increasingly being seen as a dynamic and vibrant regional organisation with immense potential to foster regional cooperation amongst its Member States.

At the "Relooking BIMSTEC 2025" conference in Kolkata, hosted by Sister Nivedita University in cooperation with ICWA, I emphasised the importance of engagement of private sector and the role of trade facilitation and customs cooperation for boosting intra-BIMSTEC trade and investment. The launch of new India leadership of the BIMSTEC Business Council by ASSOCHAM is a welcome step towards achieving the same objective. Platforms like the BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce and Industries and the BIMSTEC Platform for Investment Promotion Authorities, which are being created under BIMSTEC together with the leadership of ASSOCHAM, will provide momentum for business communities coming together, leading to better intra-BIMSTEC trade and investments in the Bay of Bengal region.

In line with its initiatives to reach out to academia and scholars, the BIMSTEC Secretariat co-hosted an enriching joint seminar in collaboration with the University of Dhaka Department of

International Relations on 'Bridging regions, building futures: BIMSTEC under the spotlight.'

Collaborations under environmental and climate change sector this month included an informative online consultation on Freshwater Challenge in collaboration with IUCN. Further, BIMSTEC Youth Heritage & Sustainability Immersion Programme was held in Madhya Pradesh, India, bringing together over 80 young BIMSTEC leaders, fostering the cultural and people-to-people ties that will take forward our regional cooperation.

On the auspicious occasion of the Holy month of Ramadan, I hosted an Ifar Dinner, which manifested BIMSTEC's shared Islamic heritage. The Dinner was attended by H.E. Ms. Shama Obaed Islam, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh; H.E. M Rashiduzzaman Millat, State Minister for the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism as well as other distinguished guests.

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

Indra Mani Pandey
BIMSTEC Secretary General

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Conference on Relooking BIMSTEC 2025



BIMSTEC Secretary General H.E. Indra Mani Pandey, delivered a keynote address at the Inaugural Session of the conference **"Relooking BIMSTEC 2025"** hosted by Sister Nivedita University at Kolkata, India on 20th March 2026 in cooperation with ICWA. The Secretary General highlighted that BIMSTEC has focused on enhancing Business to Business relationships, as reflected in the proposal for launching a BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce and Industry to enhance participation of the private sector. He also noted that regional organisations like BIMSTEC provide suitable platforms to address the shared developmental and security challenges. The Conference was attended by distinguished delegates from the Government, academia, think-tanks and media.

Launch Ceremony of BIMSTEC Business Council India Leadership



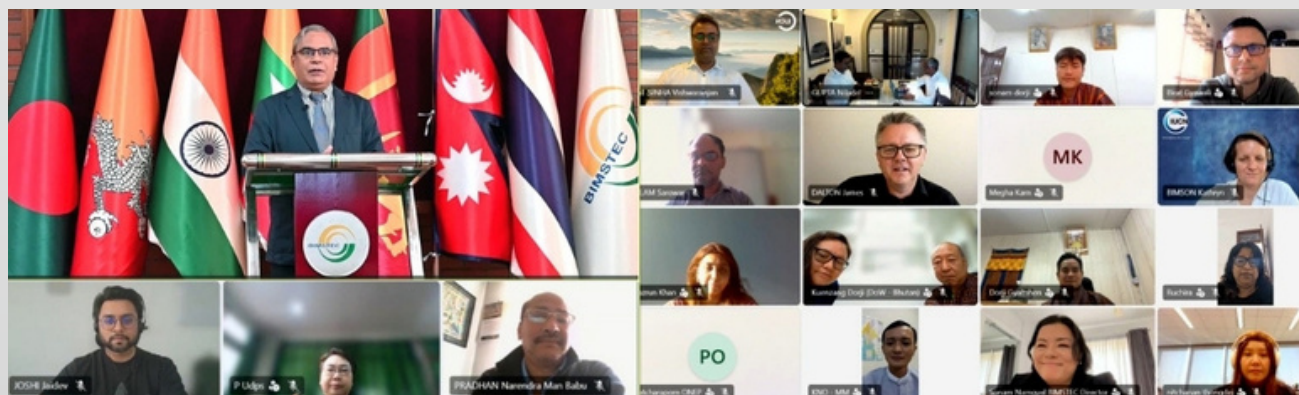
BIMSTEC Secretary General H.E. Indra Mani Pandey, participated at **ASSOCHAM's launch of new India leadership of BIMSTEC Business Council**, an important step towards strengthening intra-regional trade and investment. With its focus on Trade Facilitation, Multi-modal Connectivity, and MSME Cooperation, the goals of the business Council align with BIMSTEC Bangkok vision 2030. The Secretary General in his address, highlighted that the proposed platforms, such as the BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce & Industries and BIMSTEC Platform for Investment Promotion Authorities, will help bring the business communities of the BIMSTEC member States together for a prosperous Bay of Bengal region.

BIMSTEC Youth Cultural Heritage and Sustainability Immersion Programme



The **BIMSTEC Youth Cultural Heritage and Sustainability Immersion Programme** was held on 17–23 March 2026, Madhya Pradesh, India organised by the Ministry of External Affairs, India, in association with The Bharat Scouts and Guide bring together 80+ young leaders from across BIMSTEC States. The initiative fostered deep regional engagements and enhanced cultural understanding through which participants emerged as ambassadors of regional cooperation and people-to-people ties.

Online Consultation Programme on the Freshwater Challenge



On 18 March 2026, BIMSTEC, in collaboration with International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), hosted an **online consultation on the Freshwater Challenge**. The session was opened with a Welcome Speech by the Secretary General of BIMSTEC, emphasizing the need to advance dialogue on freshwater ecosystem restoration and conservation in our region. Participants from Member States engaged in discussions on the Freshwater Challenge and opportunities to advance restoration of rivers and wetlands across the region.

BIMSTEC Secretary General, Hosts Iftar and Underscores Bangladesh's Leading Role in Regional Cooperation under BIMSTEC



BIMSTEC Secretary General H.E. Indra Mani Pandey hosted a grand Iftar and Dinner in Dhaka on 09 March 2026 to celebrate the spirit of cooperation and solidarity of Ramadan.

It was graced by the presence of **H.E. Ms. Shama Obaed Islam, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mr. M. Rashiduzzaman Millat, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism**, and Dr. Nazrul Islam, Secretary Bilateral, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, apart from members of diplomatic, think tanks, media, academic and business community.

In her remarks, the Honourable State Minister praised BIMSTEC's role as a vital link between South and Southeast Asia and emphasized the importance of spiritual values in building a more empathetic and integrated regional community.

Welcoming the guests, BIMSTEC Secretary General noted that during this time of unprecedented global turmoil, BIMSTEC stands as a strong regional platform where the region's shared civilizational links and developmental aspirations allow us to contribute to the realisation of BIMSTEC's vision of a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable Bay of Bengal region.



The BIMSTEC Secretariat, in collaboration with the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka hosted a joint Seminar on “Bridging Regions, Building Futures: BIMSTEC Under the Spotlight”.



The BIMSTEC Secretariat, in collaboration with the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka hosted a joint Seminar on “Bridging Regions, Building Futures: BIMSTEC Under the Spotlight” on 31 March 2026.

BIMSTEC Secretary General H.E. Indra Mani Pandey delivered the keynote address as Guest of Honour highlighting BIMSTEC’s role as a unique platform bridging South and Southeast Asia, its vision, institutions, sectoral progress, and its future role. There were Panel Discussions on ‘Bridging Regions: Unpacking Integration in the Bay of Bengal’ and ‘Building Futures: Towards an Integrated Bay of Bengal Community’. The seminar featured two comprehensive panel sessions designed to unpack the complexities of regional cooperation.

Panel I on Bridging Regions – Unpacking Integration in the Bay of Bengal was moderated by Professor Dr. Rashed Uz Zaman. This session focused on the structural dimensions of integration in the Bay of Bengal Region. Mr. S.M. Mahbubul Alam, Director General, SAARC and BIMSTEC, MoFA provided insights into Bangladesh’s foreign policy priorities and BIMSTEC’s role within the organisation. Ms. Sonam C Namgyel, Director, Environment and Climate Change Division, BIMSTEC detailed why regional integration matters, pointing to the tremendous potential in having a more connected Bay of Bengal region.



Panel II on Building Futures – Towards an Integrated Bay of Bengal Community was moderated by Professor Dr. Delwar Hossain. This panel looked towards the future of the BIMSTEC community. Ambassador (Retd.) Mustafizur Rahman and Dr. Mahfuz Kabir, Research Director, (BISS) discussed the region's potential for strategic integration through enhanced multimodal connectivity, trade facilitation, regulatory harmonisation, and sectoral cooperation. The discussion highlighted key areas including energy collaboration, climate resilience, and public health, while addressing shared regional challenges. Professor Dr. Syeda Rozana Rashid, Professor, Dept of IR explored BIMSTEC's potential to exercise diplomacy and foster connectivity for technology and information sharing, institutional capacity building, Dr. Md. Nazrul Islam, Secretary (East & West), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, addressed the seminar as Chief Guest while Professor Dr. Taiabur Rahman, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Dhaka, addressed it as a Special Guest.

The seminar was a part of the initiative of the BIMSTEC Secretariat to reach out to media, academia, youth and student communication of Bangladesh and other member States.



BIMSTEC Secretary General Congratulates H.E. Mr. Balendra Shah



Advancing Science Technology and Innovation Cooperation in the BIMSTEC Region

Background :

Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) has emerged as a key pillar of BIMSTEC cooperation, reflecting the region's shared aspiration to harness innovation-led growth and technological advancement for sustainable development. Sri Lanka serves as the Lead Country for the STI sector, which also encompasses the sub-sectors of Health and Human Resource Development, thereby integrating knowledge systems with human-centric development priorities.

The importance of STI cooperation has been reaffirmed at successive BIMSTEC Summits, including the 6th BIMSTEC Summit (2025), which welcomed the finalization of the BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Science, Technology and Innovation (2023–2027). This Plan provides a structured framework for advancing collaboration in areas such as digital transformation, emerging technologies, research and development, and innovation ecosystems.

Institutional mechanisms, including the BIMSTEC Expert Group on STI Cooperation, play a central role in coordinating regional initiatives, fostering knowledge exchange, and ensuring the effective implementation of agreed priorities.

Addressing Emerging Challenges

As BIMSTEC member States navigate through an increasingly technology-driven global landscape, the STI sector is addressing a range of emerging challenges. These include bridging digital divides, promoting inclusive access to technology, and strengthening national innovation systems to enhance competitiveness.

Rapid advancements in digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and data-driven governance present both opportunities and challenges for the region. In this context, BIMSTEC is prioritizing cooperation in digital connectivity, innovation-driven entrepreneurship, and capacity building to ensure that technological progress contributes to inclusive and sustainable development.

Another key focus area is the facilitation of technology transfer and commercialization of research outputs. Strengthening linkages between academia, industry, and policymakers remains critical to fostering innovative ecosystems that can respond effectively to regional needs.

The sector is also placing growing emphasis on start-up ecosystems, youth innovation, and cross-border collaboration, recognising their role in driving economic transformation and resilience.



Key Achievements at a Glance

Over the recent years, BIMSTEC has made notable progress in strengthening STI cooperation. Key achievements include:

- Finalization of the BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Science, Technology and Innovation (2023–2027), providing a comprehensive roadmap for regional collaboration.
- Convening of three Meetings of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on STI Cooperation, reviewing progress and identifying priority actions.
- Organization of the BIMSTEC Digital Conclave in February 2025, fostering dialogue on digital transformation and innovation.
- Entry into force of the Memorandum of Association for the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in March 2025.
- Organized a Boot Camp on “Addressing Food Security to Eliminate Poverty, Combat Climate Change, and Achieve SDGs Directed to Women Empowerment” in 2025.
- Continued progress towards operationalizing the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Sri Lanka, including steps towards finalizing the Host Country Agreement and convening its Governing Board.



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

BIMSTEC SECRETARIAT

📍 HOUSE: N.W.(I)-06, ROAD: 53,
GULSHAN 2, DHAKA-1212, BANGLADESH

✉ COMMUNICATIONS@BIMSTEC.ORG

☎ +880-2222290096-98, FAX: +880-2222287565

🌐 WWW.BIMSTEC.ORG

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