People to People Contact Forums

As decided during the Seventeenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, the leaders resolved to build a deeper understanding and trust among the Member States and promote people-to-people contact at various levels of societies by exploring the possibility to establish appropriate BIMSTEC forums for parliamentarians, youth, entrepreneurs, universities, academia, research institutes, cultural organizations, and media community.

(A) BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks (BNPTT)

The BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks (BNPTT) was established subsequent to the decision taken at the Second BIMSTEC Summit held in New Delhi, India on 13 November 2008. The Third BIMSTEC Summit welcomed the setting up of the BNPTT and agreed to cooperate and coordinate for organizing short-term activities such as workshops, seminars, and exchange programs, including audiovisual programs, and building public awareness on BIMSTEC. The leaders in Goa Retreat encouraged BNPTT to organize regular consultations and programs with stakeholders from the Member States with a view to intensifying people-to-people contact. The Fourth BIMSTEC Summit noted with satisfaction the activities of the BNPTT in enhancing public awareness about BIMSTEC and direct the relevant agencies to finalize the terms of reference (ToR) of the BNPTT. The First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPWC) held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 17-18 January 2019 finalized the ToR of the BNPTT.

The First Meeting of the BNPTT was held in New Delhi, India on 18-19 February 2010, the Second Meeting was held in Bangkok, Thailand on 08-09 October 2015, the Third Meeting was held at the BIMSTEC Secretariat, Dhaka, Bangladesh on 22-23 April 2017, the Fourth Meeting was held in Thimphu, Bhutan on 27-28
December 2018 and the Fifth Meeting of the BNPTT was held virtually in New Delhi on 21-22 September 2020.

The prime objective of the BNPTT is to promote people-to-people contact among the BIMSTEC Member States including providing policy options to the Member States on how to deepen regional cooperation, integration, and the future directions of BIMSTEC. The current members of the BNPTT are the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) from Bangladesh, Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS) from Bhutan, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) from India, Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS) from Myanmar, Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA) from Nepal, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), and Indian Studies Center of Chulalongkorn University (ISCCU) from Thailand.

(B) BIMSTEC Expert Group on VISA Matters

The First BIMSTEC Summit agreed to facilitate travel within the region for business travel, exchange programs, and tourism, including through the introduction of a BIMSTEC Business Travel Card/Visa. The Third BIMSTEC Summit reiterated to expand efforts to further promote people-to-people exchanges and linkages facilitating travels through the BIMSTEC Business Visa Scheme and the BIMSTEC Visa Exemption Scheme. The Fourth BIMSTEC Summit tasked the Expert Group on BIMSTEC Visa Matters to continue negotiation for the finalization of the modalities for the BIMSTEC visa facilitation.

BIMSTEC tried to initiate intra-regional tourism promotion through a free visa scheme in the region; however, there is not any visible progress to mention. The First and Second Expert Group Meetings on BIMSTEC Business Travel Card were held on 20-21 March 2006 and 1-2 February 2007 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The meetings suggested changing the name of the meeting to “Expert Group Meeting on BIMSTEC Business Visa Scheme.”
Since then, there has been a departure from the concept of BIMSTEC Business Travel Card to that of BIMSTEC Business Visa. The Third Expert Group meeting on BIMSTEC Business Visa Scheme was held on 27 November 2007 in Dhaka, Bangladesh, emphasized priority for implementation of the BIMSTEC Business Visa Scheme, and also recommended that BIMSTEC Visa Exemption Scheme should be provided to all the official and diplomatic passport holders, directly involved in BIMSTEC matters and participants to the BIMSTEC meetings/activities from the Member States. The “BIMSTEC Expert Group Meeting on Visa Schemes” was renamed as “BIMSTEC Expert Group on Visa Matters” in order to deal with the issue in its totality.

The Secretariat has compiled the best practices followed by the Member States to submit to the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Visa Matters. The Seventeenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting encouraged the holding of the Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Visa Matters soon.

(C) Association of BIMSTEC Speakers and Parliamentarians

The proposed Association of BIMSTEC Speakers and parliamentarians shall be composed of the Speakers and Parliamentarians representing the National Parliaments of the BIMSTEC Member States with the objective of strengthening people to people contact with a view to achieving mutual understanding, trust, and friendship among the peoples of the BIMSTEC countries; provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on parliamentary practices and procedures and for making suggestions; support the work of BIMSTEC and promote knowledge of its principles and activities among Parliamentarians of South Asia and South East Asia; encourage representation and participation of women and youth in the Parliaments of BIMSTEC Countries to foster sharing of experiences and promote contact among them; create dialogue and communication mechanisms for advancing involvement of women and youth in the decision-making process in the legislatures, and co-operate in international forums in the
matters of common interest.

The Charter of the Association of BIMSTEC Speakers and Parliamentarians was drafted by India and circulated by the Secretariat to all the Member States for their comments and observations.