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International Web Based Symposium

BIMSTEC: A Vehicle for Growth and Development



**25-26
October
2021**

A REPORT

In collaboration with



Ministry of External Affairs
Government of India

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INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND
CULTURAL STUDIES, INDIA

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മലയാളം സാഹിത്യ പഠന കേന്ദ്രം
കേരള സർവ്വകലാശാല
ഇന്ത്യയിലെ മലയാള സാഹിത്യ പഠന കേന്ദ്രം



In association with

International Web-Based Symposium on BIMSTEC: A Vehicle for Growth and Development Date: 25-26 October 2021

A Report

CONTENTS

BIMSTEC	5
INAUGURAL SESSION	6
TECHNICAL SESSION I: Post COVID Economic Recovery and Restoring Growth Momentum in BIMSTEC	9
TECHNICAL SESSION II: Strengthening Regional Value Chains-Role of Connectivity and Trade Facilitation	13
TECHNICAL SESSION III: Regional Cooperation in Public Health Infrastructure and Health Care Services	18
SPECIAL ADDRESS: Cyber Security amongst BIMSTEC nations: Challenges and Prognosis	21
TECHNICAL SESSION IV: Disaster Management, Maritime Cooperation, and Coastal Security	23
VALEDICTORY SESSION	27
PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION	29

As the BIMSTEC framework will be completing its 25 years in 2022, the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) in collaboration with The Ministry of External Affairs of Government of India (MEA) and the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi conducted a web-based symposium “BIMSTEC- A Vehicle for Growth and Development”, to analyse the achievements and future road map for the framework. The two-day conference was virtually conducted on October 25-26, 2021, and was attended by more than 200 participants from BIMSTEC countries. The serving and retired government officials, strategic thinkers, and academic scholars in four technical sessions deliberated on different aspects of the BIMSTEC framework. The conference also received supports from eminent research forums of BIMSTEC countries like- Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, BISS, Centre For Policy Dialogue(CPD)-Bangladesh, East Asia Study Centre University of Dhaka, Indian Studies Center of Chulalongkorn University (ISC),Bangkok and South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment(SAWTEE),Nepal.



The focus of the discussion was on the developments and engagements among the countries cloaked within the framework itself. The Covid-19 pandemic has ushered change in trends with regards to growth momentum, connectivity, trade, public health, infrastructure, and security cooperation's in the BIMSTEC region. The session-wise summary of the deliberations and outcome in the form of recommendations, as follows:

INAUGURAL SESSION

Opening Remarks :	Mr. Arindam Mukherjee , <i>Director, ISCS, India</i>
Welcome Address :	Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi , <i>Director General, RIS, New Delhi</i>
Special Address :	H.E. Mr. Tenzin Lekphell , <i>Secretary General, BIMSTEC</i>
Inaugural Address :	H.E Mr. Harsh Vardhan Shringla , <i>Foreign Secretary, MEA, India</i>

As BIMSTEC completes 24 years, it leaves behind a compelling trail of notable progress in the 14 designated priority areas of cooperation, from counterterrorism and translational crime to energy, technology, public health, and climate change. The member countries have come together to strategize solutions for better standing in each of these domains while analysing them about changing global socio-economic trends. In the wake of the unprecedented challenges posed by the covid-19 pandemic, added the concerns of elevated poverty, unemployment, waning industries, and other environmental threats. It has squeezed fiscal space. The revenue mobilization and resource collection have declined. According to the World Economic Outlook report, in 2022 average growth rate will remain 4.9%, including Bangladesh- 6.3%, Bhutan - 6.5%, Sri Lanka- 3.3%, and India- 8.5%. The Sussex studies, show the region would benefit from connectivity efforts. The regional development banks are trying to make this effort of providing regional connectivity in the BIMSTEC region, through roads, energy, digital, and people-to-people cooperation. There is also an exertion in the BIMSTEC master plan to bring in this connectivity issue through the transshipment of goods. The study has been conducted on India, Myanmar, Thailand trilateral highway and its extension to Laos and Cambodia. These initiatives will also help to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



The Neighbourhood First and Act-East (policy) which incorporates BIMSTEC countries are the cornerstone of India's foreign policy. The BIMSTEC member states adapted to the challenges of pandemics and continued, their work virtually under the guidance of the Secretary-General. As a result, commendable progress has been made in finalizing the BIMSTEC Charter, BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity, BIMSTEC Convention, and Mutually Assistance in Criminal Matters, BIMSTEC Technology, Transfer Facility Cooperation, between diplomatic academies and a template of Memorandum of Association for Future Establishment of BIMSTEC centers or entities. India has played a proactive role in building the capacity of BIMSTEC member states across various sectors of regional cooperation. At the last summit in 2018 at Kathmandu India, announced several initiatives were. Most of these initiatives have been implemented

including the hosting of the start-up conclave, military exercises, Disaster Management Exercise, training of diplomats in India, etc. The BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity was finalized, under India's Chairmanship of the Expert Group in 2020. This will stimulate intra-regional trade and investment. It identifies 264 projects requiring an investment of USD 126 billion over 10-years from 2018 to 2028. Projects worth USD 50 billion are already at different stages of implementation. Now the countries need to collectively develop a strategy for financing and implementing the transport connectivity master plan. Member states have also made progress and finalizing the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement and Motor Vehicle Agreement, which will provide the legal framework for enhanced connectivity in the region. One of the priority areas of BIMSTEC is to enhance energy cooperation and expand electricity trade to establish BIMSTEC grid interconnection. MoU for the establishment of BIMSTEC Grid was signed in the fourth BIMSTEC Summit held in 2018. The cooperation in the security sector is also of special significance as the national security advisors have met thrice since 2017. They have been working closely on issues including counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, and cybersecurity. Disaster management is another important area of collaboration among BIMSTEC countries. The BIMSTEC Centre on Weather and Climate being hosted in India is fully functional and provides early disaster warnings. Tourism is one of the most



adversely affected, sectors of the economy, due to the pandemic. In this context collaboration in intra-regional tourism will be an important facet of post-pandemic recovery. As the situation normalizes strong emphasis shall be laid on developing the BIMSTEC brand of tourism. India has also initiated discussion with the member countries on Ayush systems and collective efforts in terms of coping up with the Covid-19 crisis.

The BIMSTEC Secretariate is the most important institution which can work towards strengthening cooperation in these areas. Now the secretariate has seven directors representing all seven member states. After the previous BIMSTEC Summit, the member states have completed the negotiation of the

BIMSTEC Charter and it is expected to be signed in the coming fifth summit. In addition, three other legal instruments will also be signed including the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, Memorandum of Understanding on Mutual Cooperation between Diplomatic Academies and Training Institutions of BIMSTEC Member States, and the Memorandum of Association on the Establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Colombo. The Summit will also adopt the master plan for BIMSTEC connectivity, which has 267 projects worth USD 124 billion. The member states

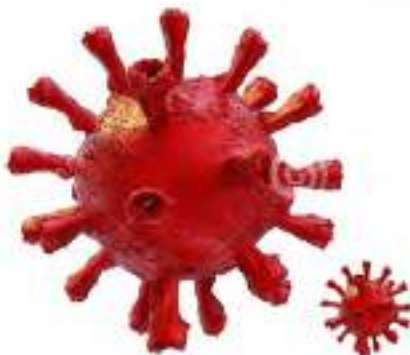


have ratified the BIMSTEC convention on cooperation in combating international terrorism, transnational organized crime, and illicit drug trafficking which has entered into force on March 16, 2021. With renewed political commitment, in the upcoming fifth summit in Colombo BIMSTEC hopes to play a more visible and strengthened role in promoting peace, prosperity, and sustainable development in the future.



TECHNICAL SESSION I:

**Post COVID Economic Recovery
and Restoring Growth
Momentum in BIMSTEC**



Chair-	Dr. Posh Raj Pandey , <i>Chairman, SWATEE, Nepal</i>
Speaker	Amb. Rajiv Bhatia , <i>Former Ambassador of India to Myanmar</i>
Speaker-	Ass. Prof. Surat Horachaikul , <i>Founding Director of India Studies Centre of Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand</i>
Speaker-	Dr. Fahmida Khatun <i>Executive Director, Centre For Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh</i>
Discussant-	Shrabana Barua , <i>ICSSR Doctoral Fellow, Center for International Politics Organization and Disarmament, JNU, New Delhi</i>

The covid pandemic has disrupted political economic and social systems all over the world. Every crisis has three phases, emergence, regression, and recovery. Multilateral organization, such as World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Asian Development Bank has revised growth rate downward compared to their previous projection among the BIMSTEC countries. The covid has also amplified economic and social inequalities and the vulnerability of the financial system. On the one hand, pandemics disrupted the supply chain and reduced the manufacturing activity, while on the other hand supply shortages have increased commodity prices. The consumer price level has doubled. Against these backgrounds, there is a need to find pathways for sustained inclusive and green recovery among BIMSTEC countries.

However, as the BIMSTEC economies are recovering in many cases, they need to grow more resilient and sustainable. Earlier there was no adequate investment both from the private and the public sector and also there was resource constraint. For example, in Bangladesh, where the revenue-GDP ratio or the tax-GDP ratio was very low. Now the priority suggests more investment in the health sector for ensuring

vaccination for all as soon as possible. However, there is still uncertainty persisting over the pandemic. Therefore, the objective should be to contain the spread of the virus to progress economically.

The second issue is a continuation of accommodative monetary policy to support the private sector. Because the larger firms have been able to survive but the MSMEs couldn't due to lack of access to funds even though there were stimulus packages. One of the reasons would be many smaller businesses



are informal and were not able to produce the required documentation to complete the formalities. The third aspect is that higher investment not only on physical infrastructure but also software infrastructure. Which requires investing in universities. Considering the changed priorities, policies and regulatory framework need to be changed. The quality of investment is also crucial as the whole emphasis is on green infrastructure. This is an initial period of the Fourth Industrial Revolution which is disrupting the labor market. The immediate interventions are needed for upskilling and risk selling of the existing



labor force and creating more jobs for them outside the industry. Again, it requires access to finance. Cross-border e-commerce provides a big opportunity for economic integration. However, there are some issues, such as mode payments and taxations are now being discussed at the WTO. BIMSTEC can come up with its own regulatory framework for e-commerce. The primary requirement for businesses like e-commerce would be Internet infrastructure, which needs to be strengthened as required skilled human resources are already available in the region. To restore and sustain the economic growth also requires increased participation of the female labor force. According to the UNDP and WEF reports, there is a huge gender gap within this region.



Communication is an important aspect to increase cohesiveness between the BIMSTEC countries, and that gap can be mitigated by learning the languages. However, India has only one institute of language located in the East, which is the global academy for foreign language and professional training, and unfortunately, it doesn't deal with any of the languages of the BIMSTEC countries. Learning languages will increase the communication between youth and grow chances of employability. The diaspora management and remittances on the diaspora can also be factored into the post-pandemic economic recovery of the region.

The other issues which need to be focused on the blue economy, international maritime trade, interregional trade, partnership on food security, and climate-resilient across ecosystems under the BIMSTEC brand.

Political, diplomatic, and economic determination is required to create such a brand, particularly in the field of trade and industry. Such as the scheme of BIMSTEC visa which allows free movement, across the BIMSTEC region. Also, there is a need to change the nomenclature by stopping calling it a sub-region as the BIMSTEC has now become a full-fledged region. It is centered around the Bay of Bengal so it involves the Bay of Bengal community.

There is an immediate need of strengthening the BIMSTEC secretary's office to accelerate the pace of economic cooperation as the agreements don't work on their own. However, focusing only on economic

relations alone can be futile from the sustainable development point of view. A strategic approach towards people-to-people connectivity through well-planned programs and activities is needed. And this can be done if given more space to the secretary.

Meanwhile, the threat emanating from extremist ideologies can derail this process of progress because eventually, extremism can run in parallel with the national interest. People-to-people connectivity can increase the tolerance level, which will deny space to extremism while embracing pluralism. Narrowed national interest also plays the role of barrier in cooperation for building sustainable societies. Further, it becomes more challenging under geopolitical competition. A crisis like a pandemic provides opportunities to the external powers to interfere in national and regional matters.

China is one of the major external players in the BIMSTEC region and wants to be a principal interlocutor which is not accepted by many countries. Rather than wasting time while devising the individual strategies



of dealing with China the BIMSTEC member countries should come up with a joint approach. The political and security instability in Myanmar can hinder the growth of BIMSTEC, which also requires a collective approach to resolve the issue.



TECHNICAL SESSION II:

**Strengthening Regional Value
Chains-Role of Connectivity and
Trade Facilitation**



Chair-	Prof. Mustafizur Rehman <i>Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh</i>
Speaker-	Dr. S.K. Mohanty , <i>Professor, RIS, New Delhi</i>
Speaker-	Dr. Mahfuz Kabir , <i>Research Director, BISS, Bangladesh</i>
Speaker-	Dr. Paras Kharel , <i>Research Director, SWATEE, Nepal</i>
Speaker-	Mr. Thiam Hee Ng , <i>Director, South Asia Regional Cooperation Division, ADB, Manila</i>
Discussant-	Ms. Dikshya Singh , <i>Programme Coordinator, SWATEE, Nepal</i>

The BIMSTEC members are struggling to translate comparative advantages into competitive advantage while building connectivity and trade facilitation infrastructure for strengthening regional value chains and production networks. One of the reasons would be they are just focusing on transport connectivity and neglecting trade facilitation. These countries are used to preferential market taxes, but now they require a transition from access-driven comparative, and competitive advantages to productivity and skills-driven competitive advantage.

Most of the countries in the region, adopted for export growth that has led to a huge jump in their GDP and per capita income during 2002-07. It has led to interdependence particularly for parts and



components. Now the countries should take an integrated intra-regional approach to ensure priorities are given to the BIMSTEC. However, in the last decade compared to other regional groupings BIMSTEC has shown excellent growth primarily driven by the trade sector. The share of the region in global trade grew steadily as it was just 2% in 2003 but by 2020 it reached close to 5%, despite the global economic downturn. BIMSTEC is in the early stage of engagement with the other sectors particularly the forward linkage with the upstream segment where the value addition is very less. But it is more relatively engaged in the manufacturing sector, and the next endeavor would be to go to the downstream segment with the backward linkages. The production is growing along with the value chain. The developing countries are now at the lower end of the value chain but picking up fast. Intermittent sector is once again leading



and closely associated with the regional value chain. Governments have a very important role in terms of promoting regional value chain and therefore liberalization. The government should also focus on developing trade infrastructure in the region. So original investment illumination is very much important to promote original valuation, and the regions should also focus on developing specific original products.

The regional countries are working in this direction. For example, Bangladesh has come up with two major documents one is the Five Year Plan and the second is 20-Years Strategy which is a road map towards becoming a developed country by the year 2041. In both the documents, it is mentioned that Bangladesh should be a part of the regional value chain. The documents also clearly state that the



country should sign the FTA. However, implementation of the policies within a specific framework and timeline remains a major challenge. Simultaneously, Bangladesh is creating other opportunities like it has identified 100 SEZs, welcoming investors from the BIMSTEC countries. Other countries are taking similar initiatives in a fragmented way, staying out of the BIMSTEC framework.

On this background, the export competition can be negated through the flow of intermediate goods and raw materials. This issue should be taken into the consideration in the upcoming summit as there is a huge potential for the flow of intermediate goods which is important for Intra industry trade, value chain engagement, and diversification. This will create multiplier effects on other trades and businesses.

Removing the cross-border trade barriers, electronic data exchanges, paperless trade, and improving subregional connectivity is the other issue that will increase intra-regional trade.

Laying the timeline and following it strictly is imperative to achieve this goal.

The members of BIMSTEC are also members of other regional groupings, therefore comes a comparison between them. Such as, will BIMSTEC be able to deliver where SAFTA could not deliver?

How will BIMSTEC FTA will be different from SAFTA? If these questions have not been answered then BIMSTEC minus two countries will become BBIN. There is a possibility of an experience of two ASEAN members, Thailand and Myanmar about tackling NTBs can help. The BIMSTEC FTA will help the landlocked countries to increase their exports and eventually generate employment. Further, countries may not need to spend time in the negotiation of bilateral PTAs. The private sector is unaware of the existing market potential in smaller countries like Nepal and Bangladesh as they are obsessed with larger markets such as India. Sensitization of the private sector on this issue would be very imperative.



This will also lead to increased FDI in the recently started SEZ's in Nepal and Bangladesh which is crucial for these countries to connect with the global value chain. India and Thailand can help other countries on this front.

Connectivity is a critical component in the value chain. BBIN countries have successfully established the linkages. Now the issue remains, connecting to South-East Asia, which cannot be done taking Myanmar onboard. Considering the geopolitical situation evolving in and around Myanmar other BIMSTEC countries need to approach such sensitive matters very carefully.



The acquisition of finances to fund BIMSTEC projects from the international banking systems is a monumental task. However, Asian Development Bank (ADB) is on the front financing these projects. All the BIMSTEC members are signatories of the WTO hence they are already agreed on many of the trade facilitation arrangements, but lack implementation. The Pandemic has provided an opportunity to resolve some of the impediments using cutting-edge technologies such as the digital train infrastructure project ADB is doing in Bangladesh under the Sunset program. This will also help BIMSTEC countries improve and expedite procedures at border crossing points. ADB is also working to improve the concept of economic corridors by connecting different modes of transports across the borders and resolving corporate rights to make things flow smoothly throughout the region. For example, the East Coast economic corridor and Northeast economic corridor in India. ADB partnering with the BIMSTEC secretariat in preparing the master plan on transport connectivity which will be endorsed soon.

One of the major issues when it comes to any regional trading arrangement would be about how to address unequal economic development. There should be an arrangement to recognize lower-income countries and help them to create a fair level playing field. The BIMSTEC FTA framework needs to consider this aspect.

One of the advantages of the BIMSTEC FTA is it includes, both goods and services. Trade-in goods services are closely entwined. BIMSTEC FTA also needs to be futuristic and prepare to handle issues such as labour rights, government rights, debt traps, and credit lines. Particularly, projects need to be chosen carefully considering their economic feasibility and to avoid debt trap by a single source of funding while diversifying credit suppliers. The private sector needs to be sensitized on these issues as well as governments should help them with revenue generation and protection which sometimes override the potential benefits that could accrue from regional and sub-regional cooperation. This issue is also linked with the distinction between regionalization and regionalism. To have trade facilitation at the border, beyond the border and behind the border reforms, there is a need for a proactive state. Therefore, conscious policy choices make a distinction between regionalization and regionalism.



TECHNICAL SESSION III:

Regional Cooperation in Public Health Infrastructure and Health Care Services



Chair:	Dr. Mannava Maruti Vara Prasada Sarma, <i>Professor, and HOD, Department of Community Medicines, Kamineni College, India</i>
Speaker:	Dr. Pandup Tshering, <i>Health Secretary, Bhutan</i>
Speaker-	Shiva Raj Adhikari, <i>Head of Department, Central Department of Economics, Tribhuvan University, Nepal</i>
Speaker-	Dr. Sanjay Rai, <i>Prof of Community Medicines, AIIMS and National President, IPHA</i>
Discussant-	Dr. Monika Langeh, <i>Emergency Physician BLK-MAX hospital, New Delhi, NMO General Secretary, India</i>

The Covid-19 pandemic has taught a lesson that intersectoral, multisectoral, and inter-regional collaboration is a must. Digital cooperation in a public health system is strengthening in two ways during a pandemic and under normal circumstances. The health equity firming solvent system for pandemics, timely sharing of information on outbreaks are some of the important aspects of it. BIMSTEC countries can form a high-level committee to identify major public health issues and find solutions for them. The committee should also establish a regional coordination mechanism for sharing the information. The



regional countries have different levels of human resource capacities in the health sector. Therefore, the states can collaborate in training and sharing good public health practices using telematics and telemedicine programs. In the post-pandemic period, mental health can be identified as one of the challenges which can be dealt with together sharing expertise and experiences.

There is an immediate requirement of improving the rural health infrastructure of the region with the help of specialists and social scientists. Routine healthcare has suffered during the pandemic, particularly child health programs. To avoid such a crisis in the future there is a need to focus on training health workers, value structure, clear guidelines programs, delivery services, and cooperation and collaboration. The 'out-of-pocket payment' for the health facilities is high in the BIMSTEC region, which needs to be reduced. This will improve the wealth as well the health of people.



The BIMSTEC region has a good heritage of home remedies, which requires research. A BIMSTEC health university can be established to research rich home remedies. The use of traditional medicines



can bring down the load from government health infrastructure. BIMSTEC countries have not met at the summit level to discuss health emergencies even though it is one of the severe non-traditional security threats.



Special Address: Cyber Security amongst BIMSTEC nations: Challenges and Prognosis



Chair

Dr. Uttam Sinha,

Head, Non-Traditional Security Centre, MP-IDSA, India

Speaker

Lt. Gen. Rajesh Panth

National Cyber Security Coordinator, India

Cyber risks are on the rise and continue to rank very high among the global risks ranking. During the pandemic, the use of technology has seen a great acceleration, but also it has shown an inequality within and between societies, which has equally exposed to cyber vulnerabilities.

Human beings are remaining the weakest link of the cyber chain. Cybercrime is the biggest man-made risk to economic growth and all the nations are affected by that. As estimated loss due to cybercrime in 2020 was six trillion US dollars. Cybercriminals are getting smarter and they belong to international



syndicates. The only way to counter these attacks is by international cooperative collaboration as criminals are also cooperating to provide ransomware as a service. Seven challenges are common to all are BIMSTEC nations.

1. How to spread cyber security awareness to the large populations that exist in the region?
2. Obtaining and sharing cyber threat intelligence.
3. How to carry out an incident response in real-time?
4. The growing menace of cybercrime.
5. How to protect critical information infrastructure
6. Protection against ransomware against supply chain (hardware & software) attacks.
7. How to protect the digital economy to ensure maintaining growth rate?

These challenges require a lot of coordination between cyber agencies, national security agencies, law enforcement agencies, and the judicial processes. An effective and coordinated collective response requires exchanging information on national strategies and policies. There is also a need for consultative frameworks which are required for confidence building and enhancing information sharing on the ICT.



There has been a consensus at the United Nations on the norms of responsible behavior in cyberspace. The adoption of a roadmap for BIMSTEC cyber security cooperation can be seen as progress in tackling these challenges. The countries can actively move forward using this mechanism to:

1. Share experiences and best practices for the protection of critical information infrastructure.
2. Strengthen law enforcement cooperation to address cybercrime, cyber terrorism, and cyber security.
3. Develop a BIMSTEC perspective on international cyber issues such as Internet governance, cyber norms data, sovereignty, data protection, and privacy.
4. Work together on developing voluntary norms of responsible state behavior, and ensure cyberspace remains open accessible, secure, stable peaceful, and equitable ICT environment.
5. Encourage cooperation among stakeholders, including government, private sector civil society, and academia
6. Promote capacity building and skill development in the areas of cybersecurity.
7. Hold BIMSTEC Cyber Security Workshop annually on a voluntary and rotational basis, as a regional forum to discuss various aspects of cybersecurity cooperation.

TECHNICAL SESSION IV:



Disaster Management, Maritime Cooperation, and Coastal Security

Chair :	Dr. Asanga Abeyagoonasekera <i>Academic, Geopolitics and foreign policy analyst, Sri Lanka</i>
Speaker:	Prof. Delwar Hossain, <i>Professor of International Relations, and Founder Director of East Asia Centre, University of Dhaka</i>
Speaker:	Dr. Smruti Pattanaik, <i>Research Fellow MP-IDSA, India</i>
Speaker:	Vice Admiral Shekhar Sinha (Retd.), <i>Former Chief of Integrated Defence Staff & Commander in Chief Western Naval Command</i>
Discussant -Speaker-	Moutusi Islam, <i>Research Fellow, BISS</i>

The Bay of Bengal (BoB), it's about 2100 Km long and is 1610 Km wide. One country cannot manage the security of these 2.6 million square kilometers of the area alone. Therefore, Maritime Cooperation is not something of a choice but a necessity. The BoB is also very vulnerable to disasters due to its triangular shape, low flat, coastal terrain, shallow depth of water, and easterly waves. And that is why it is the epicenter of the world's hazard belt.

The maritime time cooperation, coastal security, and disaster management are all interlinked. Therefore to deal with challenges and opportunities BIMSTEC countries need to cooperate. The interest of external powers increasing and colliding in the BoB region. To face these challenges together, the



BIMSTEC countries lack confidence in each other. This also can be seen through the intensity of threats posed by arms trafficking, human trafficking, illegal fishing, maritime accidents, sea pollution, and weak port securities in the BoB. On the background of these threats BIMSTEC is facing three major challenges:

1. It should avoid the SAARC trap by being more active on the ground and talking less rhetoric.
2. Currently, there is a very strong push for bilateralism in the BIMSTEC region but there has to be a space for BIMSTEC as a multilateral institution to thrive.
3. The role of external actors needs to be accommodated only if they are engaged based on principles following Rules-based order.



Multiple overlapping institutional mechanisms is existing in BoB to tackle these issues. Considering there not only maritime countries are members of the BIMSTEC but there are some landlocked countries like Nepal and Bhutan which needs to be accommodated by formulating the policies because they have

stakes and interest as their trade also depends on maritime routes. There is a possibility of a joint conflict resolution mechanism within BIMSTEC countries, however, it can invoke sovereignty issues. But at the non-governmental level, countries can come up with security architecture where more things can be done. This also increases the importance of civil society where they can deliver small but important things which touch upon the lives of the people and perhaps that will lead to building an inclusive BIMSTEC community.



Now India's Sagar initiative that is Security and Growth for All in the Region provided a push to the cooperation in the field of economic growth and security, being two sides of the same coin. This strategy also provides a platform to initiate discussion of information sharing, joint exercises, capacity building, and early warning system collaboration, aiming rescue, relief, and recovery. However, countries expedited the procedure to establish a mechanism to share the white shipping data, forming the working



groups of various streams of cooperation to emerge as more Non-traditional threat-based organizations and not into any geopolitical one.

The blue economies are essential for attaining more sustainable and inclusive economic development. BIMSTEC has rightly identified the blue economy as an important sector for cooperation. COVID-19 has immensely impacted the base of the blue economy. For example, during the pandemic sale of fish has drastically reduced resulting in unemployment among the fishing community in the Bay of Bengal. Another sector that came standstill was tourism. However, one particular area of the blue economy, which we tend to ignore is environmental sustainability. Several studies show that there are clear linkages between marine plastic pollution and Covid-19, because of the surge of use and improper disposal of plastic waste and face masks. To emerge from this crisis BIMSTEC needs to:

1. Develop a consistent definition and suitable accounting framework for measuring the contribution of the blue economy.
2. Formulate and strengthen legal frameworks to better integrate the blue economy. Such as devising an internal code of conduct, and best practices to regulate fisheries and protect the bay from overfishing besides the development of environmental policies and regulations towards conserving and managing the sustainable use of the ecosystem.
3. Prioritizing higher education on better resource facilities.



4. Developing blue economy Institutional framework. Such as establishing BIMSTEC Economic Centre to create and manage a Blue Economy-related database. Also act as a medium of networking among the national level institutions, as well as ensure coordination with other BIMSTEC centers. The University will also prepare the groundwork such as feasibility studies data collection besides enhancing cooperation for capacity building and sharing experiences.

Valedictory Session

Special Remarks:

Amb. Dr. Anupam Ray

Joint Secretary, PP&R Division, MEA Govt. of India

Distinguished Speaker:

Prof. Suranjan Das

Vice-Chancellor, University of Jadavpur

Presentation of the Symposium: Dr. Priyadarshi Dash

Associate Professor, RIS, New Delhi Academic, Geopolitics and foreign policy analyst, Sri Lanka

Education and culture historically provided an essential link of connectivity between India and other BIMSTEC countries. The expansion of the existing opportunities in this field can enable India to use soft power diplomacy for strengthening regional cooperation within the BIMSTEC.



Specific Recommendations

1. Develop a strategy for financing and implementing the transport connectivity master plan.
2. Establish regional development banks to support in the form of financing and preparing the countries to make their infrastructure more sustainable.
3. Post-Pandemic strong emphasis shall be laid on developing the BIMSTEC brand of tourism.
4. Develop a regional regulatory framework for cross-border e-commerce.
5. BIMSTEC University- to learn regional languages, traditional medicines, Economic Centre to manage Blue Economy
6. BIMSTEC visa to allow free movement across the region.



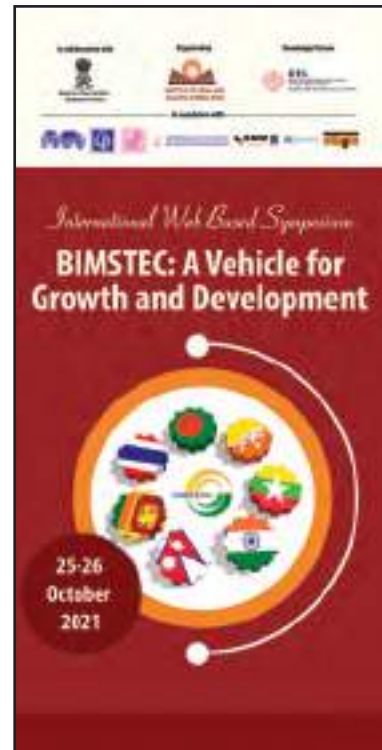
7. Joint approach towards dealing with China.
8. Countries should develop region-specific products to promote the BIMSTEC brand
9. Export competition between BIMSTEC members can be negated through a flow of intermediate goods and raw materials.
10. Form a high-level committee to identify major public health issues and find the solutions for them. The committee should also establish a regional coordination mechanism for sharing the information.
11. Hold BIMSTEC Cyber Security Workshop annually on a voluntary and rotational basis, as a regional forum to discuss various aspects of cybersecurity cooperation.
12. Establish joint conflict resolution mechanism within BIMSTEC countries
13. India should invite BIMSTEC countries as an observer to large naval exercises like MALABAR.



Publicity and Promotion



Writing Pad



Standee



Backdrop

BIMSTEC: A Vehicle for Growth and Development



Facebook backdrop



Flyer

Newspaper & Social Media Coverage



Times of India, 23rd October, 2021



Ei Samay , November 17, 2021



Ei Samay , November 13, 2021

BIMSTEC: A Vehicle for Growth and Development



Dedicated Facebook for the web Conference



Publicity through ISCS Facebook page



Live webcast



In-person participation at work station in both the days



Social media publicity through Teaser



Conference news at BIMSTEC website, Facebook and Twitter page



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