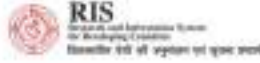




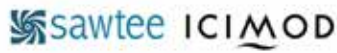
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2nd ISCS BIMSTEC CONFERENCE 25 YEARS OF DRIVING FORCE BEHIND N EIGHBOURHOOD COOPERATION

25 and 26 March, 2023 | Hotel Taj Bengal, Kolkata, India





2nd ISCS-MEA Bimstec Conference 25 Years of Driving Force Behind Neighbourhood Cooperation

25 and 26 March, 2023

Hotel Taj Bengal, Kolkata, India

A Report





The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) organized a “Regional Conference on 25 Years of Driving Force behind Neighbourhood Cooperation”, in Kolkata, India on March 25-26, 2023. The conference was the second in the series organized by the ISCS. The conference hosted participants from seven BIMSTEC Countries, namely, India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Sri Lanka. The discussions were thematically divided into 5 sessions and one special session dealing with various aspects of the BIMSTEC cooperation.

Day 1 Inaugural Session

Speakers

- Welcome Address : **Mr. Arindam Mukherjee**
Director, ISCS, India
- Keynote Speaker : **Mr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh**
Honourable Minister of State, Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Education, Government of India
- Guest of Honour : **Mr. Tenzin Lekphell**
Honourable Secretary General of BIMSTEC, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Mr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Honourable Minister of State, Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Education, Government of India, in the inaugural speech identified several areas of BIMSTEC cooperation like transport connectivity, food security, climate change, people-to-people connect, educational cooperation and cultural exchanges.

Mr. Singh commenced his remarks with importance levelled to the strategic position of Kolkata, to accentuate Indian foreign policy's regard for the east and its "Act East diplomatic strategy". Synonymously, an institution like the BIMSTEC can be instrumental in forwarding this idea, especially around the Bay of Bengal region that has been regaining its geopolitical strengths in the recent past. Referring to the challenges faced in the post COVID-19 era, Minister Singh mentioned the importance of BIMSTEC for collective action and collaborations for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals and targets pertaining to this region. He also mentioned Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to providing financial resources to the organization. In this regard, India's motivation to resolve the food crisis through 'millet diplomacy,' finds an opportunity to be paved through BIMSTEC, addressing the eastern and north-eastern parts of the country. He staunchly advised putting more effort to finalize ongoing

transport connectivity initiatives – such as the negotiations on the Maritime Transport Agreement and Motor Vehicle Agreement. Further, he suggested identifying specific areas, such as "Trade Facilitation" or promoting regional value chains in agriculture that by themselves can enhance intra-BIMSTEC trade even while negotiators continue their work on the BIMSTEC FTA. Once the political leadership, along with the civil society remain at par with their intentions towards invoking a more concrete action oriented BIMSTEC, real development would be inevitable.

A similar progressive pattern of thought was also visible in the discourse of the Honourable Secretary General of BIMSTEC, Mr. Tenzin Lekphell. Highlighting BIMSTEC's precision in rationalizing seven areas of cooperation from fourteen, he mentioned the several progresses that have been made, with each country leading their own area of concern. He has noted some of the initiatives successfully taken forward by the BIMSTEC, such as the Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, MoU on Mutual Cooperation between Diplomatic Academies, and the establishment of the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Colombo, the adoption of the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity and the approval of the BIMSTEC Maritime



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INAUGURAL SESSION

2nd ISCS BIMSTEC CONFERENCE

BIMSTEC : 25 Years of Driving Force behind Neighbourhood Cooperation

25th March, 2023; Hanoi, Vietnam

2nd ISCS
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25 Years of
Driving Force
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of

Transport Cooperation Agreement. Even though areas like the creation of a free trade agreement, remain on the backfoot, the last twenty-five years have been a journey toward creating a more stable platform with regular meetings and attainment of unanimity among the common grounds. External issues such as natural calamities like the pandemic and geopolitical hiccups like the Ukraine conflict, frequently impact progress.

This aspect was affirmed by Mr. Arindam Mukherjee, who reiterated India's perspective of an empowered and inclusive 'Amrit Kaal' through its mantra of 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav,' congruously fitting into its contributions towards BIMSTEC. Premised upon the crux of enhanced connectivity, envisioning an arc of prosperity, the BIMSTEC not only reflects a region but shared dreams and values among all the member nations. He focussed on connectivity, often been forwarded as a key cog of international competitiveness and is also the initiator of the new geopolitical 'great game.' Nonetheless, what it also puts on the table are high rewards with quality infrastructure along with peace building and conflict resolution through trade enhancement, creation of cultural links, flexible mobility, and empowered citizens. As an innovative dimension of the soaring Asian century, multifaceted ideas of connecting areas of mutual interest and concerns indeed make the BIMSTEC a unique cross-regional grouping which holds tremendous potential.





Mr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh
Honourable Minister of State, Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Education, Government of India



Mr. Tenzin Lekphell
Honourable Secretary General of BIMSTEC, Dhaka, Bangladesh





Technical Session I

BIMSTEC: Strengthening Regional Solidarity through Transport Connectivity

- Chair : **Dr. Sanjeev Ranjan**
Chairman, National Shipping Board
- Speakers : **Mr. Thiam Hee Ng**
Director, South Asia Regional Cooperation Division, ADB, Manila
- Dr. Mahfuz Kabir**
Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Dhaka, Bangladesh
- Dr. Posh Raj Pandey**
Chairperson, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) Nepal
- Mr. Md. Mosharaf Hossain**
Director, BIMSTEC Secretariat
- Dr. Constantino Xavier**
Research Fellow, Centre For Social and Economic Progress, CSEP, New Delhi

The first Technical Session on Strengthening Regional Solidarity through transport connectivity found its pivot around a reaffirmed strong commitment of the member countries towards deeper integration, promoting a prosperous Bay of Bengal. This includes improving hard (road, rail, air, maritime) and soft (digital) infrastructure. Underscored with the commitment to more effective cooperation in improving transportation and communication infrastructure for improving people's living standards, the panellists focused on fostering seamless multimodal connectivity among BIMSTEC member countries towards improving transport and trade linkages with other regions as highlighted in BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity. This requires less operation dependence on external actors like ADB which could play the role of facilitators but not the planners, further countries should cut down the steps at the implementation level by using advanced and secure technologies. This can be achieved by involving the private sector. WB and JICA can also be invited to facilitate the projects. As suggested by Mr. Thiam Hee Ng, now that the Master plan has been adopted at the Fifth BIMSTEC Summit, countries should move quickly towards implementation. Financing will be



Dr. Sanjeev Ranjan
Chairman, National Shipping Board



Dr. Mahfuz Kabir

Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Dhaka, Bangladesh



Dr. Posh Raj Pandey

Chairperson, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) Nepal



Mr. Md. Mosharaf Hossain

Director, BIMSTEC Secretariat

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Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India

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BIMSTEC

TECHNICAL BIMSTEC: STRENGTHENING SOLIDARITY THROUGH TECHNICAL COOPERATION

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Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India

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25 Years of Driving Force behind Neighbourhood Cooperation

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INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES, INDIA



SESSION – I STRENGTHENING REGIONAL TRANSPORT CONNECTIVITY

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25 Years of
Driving Force
and
Neighborhood
Development





Dr. Constantino Xavier

*Research Fellow, Centre For Social and Economic Progress,
CSEP, New Delhi*



Dr. Thiam Hee Ng

*Director, South Asia Regional Cooperation Division, ADB,
Manila*

key and private-sector participation will be crucial. Appropriate institutional arrangements are needed, and member states need to integrate the Master plan into their national development plans. As argued by Dr. Posh Raj Pandey and Dr. Constantino Xavier, intra-regional trade and investment is low despite high potential. One of the reasons is the lack of last-mile connectivity in the border areas. To overcome such hurdles, asset privatisation and PPP needs to be considered to increase the attractiveness of these projects. Regular workshops need to be conducted to evaluate and monitor the projects. On these front states have their own priorities, hence they also can develop an independent monitoring process which can further cooperate with the BIMSTEC secretariat.

Dr. Mahfuz Kabir suggested to accelerate process of signing of the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement and Motor Vehicles Agreement, which would be milestones in boosting connectivity among its members. However, BIMSTEC members are currently struggling with the unprecedented back-to-back effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and Ukraine conflict that dampened their economic growth as global economic shocks posed manifold economic and developmental challenges. Challenges

emanating from massive disruptions in input-output supply chains and energy crises deepened the slowdown of the integration processes through connectivity. In this regard, Dr. Xavier focused on trade liberalization and transportation infrastructure as the two important coping mechanisms, unless there are significant investments to foster people-to-people exchanges. Concerns were also raised about the two landlocked member states-Nepal and Bhutan, which are more vulnerable to external shocks. Bangladesh has shown a strong commitment to providing sea connectivity to Nepal and Bhutan. Some of the challenges which could be hampering these efforts and need immediate attention are: the timeline of the projects, connectivity disparity, cross-border value chains and women empowerment through active inclusion. The countries also need to act on greenhouse gas emissions through better design, operational efficiency, route optimisation, and technology innovation. Mr Xavier was of the view that interconnectivity increases the risk of confrontation due to overlapping of interests which needs to be considered at all levels. BIMSTEC as an institution is relatively weak at this juncture, hence it should work as a platform for discussion and sharing ideas rather than an enforcer,

Special Session

Reviewing Food Security and Value Chain Approach in BIMSTEC Countries

- Chair : **Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi**
DG, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi, India
- Chair : **H.E. Mr. Moe Kyaw Aung**
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Embassy of Myanmar, New Delhi
- Speakers : **Dr. Herath Manthirithilake**
Emeritus Scientist, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Sri Lanka
- Dr. Surendra Joshi**
Head ICIMOD's Living Mountain Lab/Sr. Resilient Livelihoods Specialist, Nepal
- Dr. Shahidur Rashid**
Director, South Asia Region IFPRI, NASC Complex, New Delhi

The BIMSTEC region is home to around 1.8 billion people, with agriculture as the major source of employment. The region faces major challenges of climate change, water scarcity and desertification, loss of biodiversity, rapid migration, random urbanization, and food and nutrition insecurity. Dr.

Surendra Joshi mentioned that more than 250 million people face malnourishment. Climate change has further added to the vulnerabilities of agriculture and food insecurity. As per the Global Climate Risk Index 2021, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, and Thailand are among the top ten countries most affected by climate



Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi

DG, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India



H.E. Mr. Moe Kyaw Aung, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Embassy of Myanmar, New Delhi



Dr. Herath Manthrilake, Emeritus Scientist at the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Sri Lanka



Dr. Surendra Joshi, Head ICIMOD's Living Mountain Lab/Sr. Resilient Livelihoods Specialist, Nepal



Dr. Shahidur Rashid, Director, South Asia Region IFPRI, NASC Complex, New Delhi, India

SPECIAL SE RENEWING FOOD S VALUE OF ADDITION



DR. SUBRATA MATHURTHILAKE

PROF. SACHIN CHATURVEDI



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SECURITY AND

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP



H.E. MR. MOE KYAW KUNG

change. The region offers potential for intra-regional trade, technical cooperation, and knowledge sharing for value chain development and food security.

In this context, Dr. Shahidur Rashid mentioned the development of efficient and sustainable value chains, becoming increasingly linked with global and regional integration arrangements, and this is evident from the fact that over 240 preferential trade arrangements are now in existence. To be part of evolving value chains in a climate-affected, post-pandemic, and conflict-ridden world, the importance of regional economic cooperation like BIMSTEC cannot be overstated. An increase in food trade can help in reducing vulnerability to weather

and price shocks, diversifying cropping patterns thus making diet modifications less expensive and raising the incomes of farmers by integrating them into the regional value chains. One region-one standard could help to ease the pressure from supply chains. The countries need to focus on food processing, agriculture & fisheries diversification, promoting traditional farming, increasing farmers' income, and reducing the cost of farming. Additionally, Dr. Manthrilake mentions the reduction of food waste as one solution, which so far has not drawn full attention. Further, BIMSTEC countries should invest in research, education, market assurance and climate resilience to attain collective food security.



Technical Session II

BIMSTEC Countries and Climate Change: Imperatives and Initiatives

- Chair : **Prof. Jayanta Bandyopadhyay**
Visiting Distinguished Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, Kolkata
- Speakers : **Mr. Sangay Wangdi**
Researcher, Centre for Bhutan and GNH Studies
- Dr. Yogesh Gokhale**
*Senior Fellow and Area Convenor, Centre for Forest Management and Governance
Land Resources Division, The Energy and Resource Institute*
- Prof. S.M. Shameem Reza**
Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka
- Dr. Rajdeep Roy**
Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, India

The second technical session focused on Climate change – standing as the most critical transnational threat facing the modern world. The BIMSTEC region, one of the worst impacted regions due to climate change, understands this vulnerability intimately. The Himalayan water tower which is crucial from a food and climate security perspective for BIMSTEC no longer exists. As referred to by

Dr. Yogesh Gokhale, over the period, there has been progressive development of regional cooperation to address this issue. On the contrary, the GDP of the BIMSTEC region has decreased due to impact of the climate change. In the 2018 Kathmandu declaration, there was a resolve to combat climate change at local, national, and regional levels. The commitment of the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement is



Prof. Jayanta Bandyopadhyay, *Visiting Distinguished Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, Kolkata, India*

also agreed upon. BIMSTEC countries are prone to extreme weather events and sea level rise, increasing the vulnerability of 22% of the global population. Impacts of climate change are also being faced by the natural resources in form of habitat loss, fisheries, and livelihoods dependent on fisheries. The answers to these questions lie in Nature Based Solutions (NBS). He suggested that BIMSTEC should raise loss and damage funds to help member countries during extreme natural events. Preservation and rejuvenation of mangroves will also increase regional credit in the global carbon market. This same thread was also taken up by Mr. Sangay Wangdi, who talked about the Bay of Bengal region being labelled as an ‘extreme risk’ by the Global Risk Advisory Firm, in their Climate Change Vulnerability Index. In this perspective, special mention was made of Bhutan, which has been always maintaining its commitment to 60 per cent forest cover. However, even though Bhutan has more than 70 per cent of land under

forest cover it is facing the impact of global warming.

A similar sentiment was echoed by Dr. Shameem Reza as well, who spoke about Bangladesh’s response to climate change. Even though the country has been spending a substantial chunk of funds on setting up and running climate-related projects, it hopes to achieve commitments made in COP28. For this, Bangladesh has adopted a whole-of-society approach to tackle all the different but related problems in a multi-sectoral manner. Nonetheless, the lack is stemming from the need for stronger political will as well as active engagement of the citizens. Keeping BIMSTEC in mind, the participation of the seven countries in developing a sustainable renewable energy network with the provision of affordable green energy can be an important milestone. For this, the Centre for Weather and Climate needs to be equipped enough to facilitate applied scientific research in weather and climate change along with



Mr. Sangay Wangdi

Researcher, Centre For Bhutan and GNH Studies, Bhutan



Dr. Yogesh Gokhale

Senior Fellow and Area Convenor, Centre for Forest Management and Governance Land Resources Division, The Energy and Resource Institute, India

a specific BIMSTEC financial and intellectual fund that can cater to this need. He has provided three-point formula to tackle the impact of climate change by advocating research collaboration, grassroots engagement, and resource sharing.

Dr. Rajdeep Roy's presentation pulled the thread together as he indicated India's commitment towards

SDG goals and climate change. India's know-how and ability on this front, to produce a climate-resilient technology and build capacity to support its regional neighbours would be extremely crucial for BIMTEC. India has also committed USD 3 million dollars to revive the BIMTEC Centre for Weather and Climate in Noida, showing an action-oriented plan for this domain.



Dr. S. M Shameem Reza

Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh



Dr. Rajdeep Roy, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, India



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TECHNICAL SESSION
BIMSTEC COUNTRIES AND
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DAY 2

Technical Session III BIMSTEC: An Instrument for People-to-People Connect

- Chair : **Mr. N.G. Khaitan**
President, Bharat Chamber of Commerce, Kolkata
- Speakers : **Dr. George Cooke**
Diplomatic Historian & Strategist Head of Awarelogue Initiative, Sri Lanka
- Prof. Jigme Nidup**
Assistant Professor, Norbuling Rigter College, Royal University of Bhutan
- Dr. Narut Charoensri**
Deputy Dean of Research Affairs, Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration, Chiang Mai University, Thailand
- Mr. Arindam Basu**
Former Sports Journalist and Senior Faculty, Sister Nivedita University and Senior Research Associate, ISCS

The third technical session, was on establishing relationships right at the grass root level, with civil society at its heart. As highlighted by Mr. George Cook, the common denominator remains people and all programs must converge in ensuring furtherance of the well-being of the people of the region. Thus,



Mr. N.G. Khaitan
President, Bharat Chamber of Commerce, Kolkata

it is crucial to building awareness among people through BIMSTEC research networks, think tanks and institutions, to make them heard and seen along with making them aware of what BIMSTEC, as an organization can offer them, from its diverse range of cooperative ventures.

As elaborated by Mr. Jigme Nidup, BIMSTEC should be based on the 'politics of opportunity' in terms of collaboration in the field of education through faculty-student exchange programme, institutional

linkages in teaching, learning and research. Bringing up BIMSTEC University may be a long-term plan in this regard, where Professors, faculty members and administrators can be appointed from all the member countries, creating an environment of learning. This aspect might also lead to a more relaxed and liberal VISA regime thereby increasing opportunities for fairs. Exhibitions, conferences, workshops, and seminars on various areas of interest, also leading to an increase in trade and business. This is an important aspect of soft power diplomacy, also



Dr. George Cooke

Diplomatic Historian & Strategist Head of Awarelogue Initiative, Sri Lanka



Prof. Jigme Nidup

Assistant Professor, Norbuling Rigter College, Royal University of Bhutan

paving the way for other unique areas of cooperation like food diplomacy or gastro-diplomacy and sports diplomacy. As argued by Mr. Arindam Basu, the need of the hour is to formulate a common sports policy, with regular exchanges, which would be enjoyable and entertaining, peaceful, and eventually become an instrument of identity for race and culture. Sports and modern-day politics have come to be linked with each other as an essential effect of globalization through the accelerated influence of mass media

and the creation of global ambassadors. This new narrative would be able to popularize the emphasis on people and what they are set to gain from this structure. Tourism is another important facet of the region that vitalizes collaboration and connectivity on an intra-regional level. Even though the pandemic adversely affected this sector. However, efforts are being made to promote tourism by aligning it with the band of BIMSTEC.



Dr. Narut Charoensri
 Deputy Dean of Research Affairs, Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration, Chiang Mai University, Thailand



Mr. Arindam Basu
 Former Sports Journalist and Senior Faculty, Sister Nivedita University and Senior Research Associate, ISCS

Technical Session –IV

Role of BIMSTEC towards Fostering Educational Co-operation

- Chair : **Prof. Gurmeet Singh**
Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, Pondicherry University
- Speakers : **Prof. Virendra Kumar Tewari**
Director, IIT, Kharagpur
- Dr. Debjyoti Chanda**
*Head, Department of Mass Communication and Videography,
Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata*
- Prof. Meena Vaidya Malla**
*Advisor, Policy Research Institute (PRI), Govt. of Nepal, Member, Academic
Sub-Committee, IDC, National Defence University, Nepal, Former Head,
Central Department of Political Science, TU*
- Dr. Piyanat Soikham**
*Assistant to the President for Organizational Communication and Public
Engagement, Ubon Ratchathani University; Chair of India Studies Group at Ubon
Ratchathani University, Thailand*

Fifth Technical Session has identified the BIMSTEC as a forum for sharing, experiencing, and learning among the members of the group, for which educational cooperation remains the product, as ideated by Prof. Meena Vaidya Malla. Educational Cooperation undoubtedly plays a transformational role in representing a common identity that remains rooted in civilizational heritage, culture, values and ways of life and the destinies we create thereof. Consequently, sharing wisdom, ideas, intellectual activities, and achievements would strengthen social progress for all the stakeholders to maximize expertise and capacity building for all-round development of the region. Regional education would also provide a logical response to problems like growing poverty, human deprivations, increasing ethnic conflict, political instabilities, and population pressures.

As argued by Dr. Debjyoti Chanda, Stakeholders managing BIMSTEC's programs in the education sector recognizes that unequal levels of development, lack of common language, lack of funding, and political and economic turmoil in some of the member states act as a major impediment in implementation of projects related to education. There is also the requirement of digitization of education. Post COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new online or e-learning methods, which has their own pros and cons. While it facilitates learning without being physically present, and saving financial funds, what it lacks is the opportunities for people living in suburbs who do not have access to stable internet connectivity. Thus, it comes into the countries to provide a proper digital setup, so that education can be fostered better.



Prof. Gurmeet Singh
Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, Pondicherry University

However, as discussed by Dr. Piyanat Soikham, education within BIMSTEC should not be limited to higher education or research institutions alone. It is vital to focus on primary and secondary levels of education as well. For instance, the BIMSTEC Quiz contest, held in Bhutan, to introduce the concept of the multilateral forum, to allow the young minds to familiarize themselves not only with the functions of the institution but also with the region as a large. Students get to engage and interact, bringing their own cultural side from their home countries, thereby leading to the development of an amicable environment.

Again, it is the political will of each country that can make a progress in this sector. Each country can prepare a list of experts in various fields of knowledge and exchange programs can be held regularly. These international educational exchanges will elevate MoUs among different educational institutions in all the member countries and make the effort a fruitful one.



Prof. Virendra Kumar Tewari
Director, IIT, Kharagpur



Dr. Debjyoti Chanda
 Head, Department of Mass Communication and Videography, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata



Prof. Meena Vaidya Malla
 Advisor, Policy Research Institute (PRI), Govt. of Nepal, Member, Academic Sub-Committee, IDC, National Defence University, Nepal, Former Head, Central Department of Political Science, TU



Dr. Piyanat Soikham
 Assistant to the President for Organizational Communication and Public Engagement, Ubon Ratchathani University; Chair of India Studies Group at Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand





Technical Session V

BIMSTEC: An Instrument for People-to-People Connect

- Chair : **Dr. Sarup Prasad Ghosh**
Director, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS), Kolkata
- Speakers : **Mr. Bidhayak Das**
Writer, Scholar Development Communication and Founding Editor and Managing Director, The Borderlens
- Dr. Jirayudh Sinthupan**
Director, Centre for South Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand
- Dr. Lobzang Dorji**
Senior Lecturer, Norbuling Rigter College, Royal University of Bhutan
- Dr. Rupendra Kumar Chattopadhyay**
Azad Fellow, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS), Kolkata

The final session of the conference, Technical Session six, pivoted around the reconstruction of the cultural and civilizational matrices of ancient societies across a triadic geographical expanse, stretching from the Himalayan hills to the ocean

washed mainland, passing through the borderlands of the sub-Himalayan regions, as put forth by Prof. Rupendra Kumar Chattopadhyay. Historically it includes regions of South, Southeast, and Central Asia, including, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand,



Dr. Sarup Prasad Ghosh
Director, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS), Kolkata

Myanmar, Hindukush, Karakoram, from Baluchistan to the Patkai range, to Arakan, Yoma, and the likes of so. It is, however, rather difficult to scoop out findings related to the cultural mosaic of the areas, from where we have gathered multifaceted archaeological as well as linguistic database pertaining to ancient societies. Along the soaked shores of the Bay of Bengal, as much as in the snow-clad terrains of the Himalayas, a plethora of civilizations flourished since ancient times, which today constitute an old linkage that is being revived to reconnect the people who constitute the region.

For instance, Dr. Lobzang Dorji talked about the presence of Silk Roads as an interconnected web of routes linking the ancient societies of East, South, Central, and Western Asia, and the Mediterranean contributed to the development of the world's great civilizations and enabled the exchange of technologies and ideas that reshaped the known world. Bhutan was no exception, she was part of a very important network system between Tibet, India, and China. She played a significant part in long-distance networks, most notably in the movement of tea and salt, but also spices, wool, musk, silk, pearls, metals, and



Mr. Bidhayak Das

Writer, Scholar Development Communication and Founding Editor and Managing Director, The Borderlens



Dr. Jirayudh Sinthupan

Director, Centre for South Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

many other goods. The present scenario of the pre-historical record of the Monyul region is complex and incomplete. At present, the Monyul area is now encompassed by China, Northeast India, and Bhutan. This territory was a major corridor for different migrations streams and thus an area of intensive contact between people belonging to different ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds.

In this sector, what comes of importance is the tourism industry as well, which emanates through projects like the Buddhist circuit network. The

First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) held virtually in Thimphu, Bhutan on 20 September 2021, discussed, negotiated, and finalized the draft text of the Procedures and Rules of BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission. It also agreed to prepare a draft Organogram of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO) including the Terms of References (TOR) for appointing the Director of the Observatory, Professional and General Service Staff as well as other administrative and financial matters.



Dr. Lobzang Dorji
Senior Lecturer, Norbuling Rigter College, Royal University of Bhutan



Dr. Rupendra Kumar Chattopadhyay
Azad Fellow, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS), Kolkata



Valedictory Session













Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, India

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