

Kolkata Declaration

Roadmap for a Rejuvenated BIMSTEC 2nd ISCS BIMSTEC Conference

March 25-26, 2023, Taj Bengal, Kolkata, India

- The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) organised the 2nd ISCS BIMSTEC Conference: 25 Years of Driving Force behind Neighbourhood Cooperation, in Kolkata, India on 25th and 26th March, 2023. The conference was the second in the series organised by the ISCS and hosted participants from all seven BIMSTEC countries.

- The salient points and suggestions as of the outcome of the deliberations based on the thematic sessions are as follows:

Strengthening Regional Solidarity through Transport Connectivity

- BIMSTEC can act as an enabler for the landlocked member states Nepal and Bhutan to access the region's vast maritime networks.
- The BIMSTEC nations have acquired successful implementation of the Agreement for Maritime Transport initiative and have also gained significant momentum in the Master Plan for Transport Connectivity initiative for road, railways, air, and maritime transport.
- Bridging South and Southeast Asia through connectivity will open many avenues to facilitate a robust ecosystem for commerce. Focusing on the hard and soft infrastructure is critical to the way forward.
- Conduct regular workshops to monitor the status of ongoing projects.

Food Security and Value Chain Approach

- Myanmar is the lead country for the agricultural and food security sector and has been envisaging agricultural modernisation and value addition. The focus remains on intensifying food security, promoting cost efficient cultivation through technological innovation while enhancing farmers' income.
- BIMSTEC member states must explore opportunities in food processing and value addition for strengthening the agricultural pillar of cooperation.

- The member states should focus on growing climate resilient crops with high nutritional value to address the prevailing food crisis across the region.
- BIMSTEC should address food insecurity by increasing awareness, promoting relevant policies to curb food wastage, and enhancing agricultural development to support and attain SDG targets.

Imperatives and Initiatives on Climate Change

- Bhutan, the lead country for the environment and climate change sector has managed to preserve and increase forest cover, however, such efforts need to be taken at the regional level to avert the impacts of climate change. Green initiative and other energy initiatives are being proposed to encourage a sustainable future.
- Focus should be on cultivating clean energy through developing technologies in solar, nuclear and hydrogen sectors.

People-to-people Connect

- The various modes that are being adopted to enhance people-to-people connectivity include cultural exchanges, sports diplomacy, and tourism, among others.
- The BIMSTEC region that has capability of earning USD 200 billion tourism revenue by 2024 has enriching cultural links that can strengthen people-to-people connectivity. Fast tracking implementation and developing an ease in transportation across the region with propositions such as the Buddhist and temple circuits are the need of the hour.
- Sports diplomacy has the power to transcend cultural differences and bring people together.

Educational Cooperation

- Encourage and enhance the research community to develop a culture of common resolution-based thinking, including mutual exchange of data in academia through joint institutions such as BIMSTEC University and BIMSTEC Centre for Coastal and Climate Disaster Management.
- Member states must stress on establishing a multi-disciplinary approach to educational cooperation. Technology Transfer Facility, Task Force on Traditional Medicine and human resource development are the prime components of educational cooperation.
- Youth exchange programs and cultural programs regarding the scope of BIMSTEC and its underlying issues related to the environment, economics, society, and politics need to be facilitated.
- To increase the organisation's visibility, member states must increase research funding and work with local universities to create electives on BIMSTEC.

Cultural Exchanges

- The region has historical links that paves way to forming enriching cultural diversity and a unique mix of identity. Several existing pilgrimage sites where people across the region share and connect with overlapping cultural and historical stories provides an opportunity to forming everlasting links with each of the member states.
- BIMSTEC can provide funding and support to cultural institutions, such as museums, galleries, and performing arts centres for the preservation of heritage and hosting cultural events. Additionally, BIMSTEC can establish a committee to oversee and coordinate these programs to ensure that they are effective and beneficial to all member states.