

Brief on BIMSTEC

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, **India**, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand brings together 1.5 billion people – 21% of the world population, and a combined GDP of over US\$ 2.5 trillion.

EVOLUTION OF BIMSTEC

2. **BIST-EC** (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand - Economic Cooperation) was formed at a meeting in Jun 1997 in Bangkok. Myanmar was admitted in Dec 1997 and the organization was renamed as **BIMST-EC**. The grouping expanded when Nepal and Bhutan were admitted in Feb 2004. The grouping's name was changed to **BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) at 1st Summit Meeting held in Bangkok in Jul 2004.

FUNCTIONING OF BIMSTEC

3. BIMSTEC organizes inter-governmental interactions through Summits, Ministerial Meetings, Senior Officials Meetings and Expert Group Meetings and through BIMSTEC Working Group (BWG) based in Bangkok. There have been two BIMSTEC Summit meetings (Bangkok Jul 2004, New Delhi Nov 2008), and 13 Foreign Ministerial meetings (13th MM held in Nay Pyi Taw in Jan 2011) and 15 SOMs so far. Myanmar is hosting the 3rd BIMSTEC Summit, 14th Ministerial Meeting, 16th SOM and 2nd Preparatory meetings from 1-4 March, 2014 in Nay Pyi Taw. BIMSTEC **Chairmanship** rotates among member countries (*alphabetically*). Myanmar is Chair of the Group since Dec 2009 and took over from previous chair India (Aug 2006-Dec 2009). Nepal has agreed to Chair after 3rd Summit.

BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat

4. The BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat is to be established in Dhaka with first SG to be nominated by Sri Lanka. India would be contributing 32% of the cost of Secretariat reflecting its strong commitment to BIMSTEC process.

AREAS OF COOPERATION

5. BIMSTEC has identified 14 priority areas where a member country takes lead. India is lead country for Transport & Communication, Tourism, Environment & Disaster Management and Counter Terrorism & Transnational Crime.

Transport and Communications (India)

6. *BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study (BTILS)* conducted by ADB in 2007 was endorsed in 12th Ministerial Meeting (Dec 2009). The Report was finalised in Dec 2013. ADB organised Inception Workshop on BTILS updating and 1st meeting of Expert Group on Road Development in Yangon in Jun 2013.

Tourism (India)

7. A BIMSTEC Information Centre has been established in Jul 2007 in New Delhi. Ministry of Tourism organized a meeting on BIMSTEC Information Centre and contribution to Tourism Fund (1st JWG on Tourism) in Sep 2013 in New Delhi. 1st Round Table and Workshop of Tourism Ministers was held in Kolkata in Feb 2005; Nepal held 2nd Meeting in Kathmandu in Aug 2006; Bangladesh will host next meeting.

Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC)

8. BIMSTEC cooperation under CTTC has been divided into 4 sub-groups with lead shepherds - Intelligence Sharing (Sri Lanka); Combating Financing of Terrorism (Thailand), Legal and Law Enforcement Issues (India) and Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotics Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursors (Myanmar).

9. L&T Division of MEA hosted 5th Sub-group on Legal & Law enforcement issues in Jan 2013 in New Delhi where draft Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters was

finalised. Members signed 'BIMSTEC Convention on Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking' in Dec 2009; India has ratified it.

Environment and Disaster Management

10. Ministry of Earth Sciences in association with MEA conducted a Workshop on "Seasonal Prediction and Application to Society" in June 2011. India is establishing BIMSTEC Weather and Climate Centre at National Weather Forecasting Centre at NOIDA. The MOA for establishment of the Centre was finalized at 10th Ministerial meeting in New Delhi in Aug 2008 and is expected to be signed during 3rd Summit.

Trade & Investment (Bangladesh)

11. A Framework Agreement for **BIMSTEC Free Trade Area** was signed in Phuket, Thailand in Feb 2004. The Framework Agreement commits the parties to negotiate FTAs in goods, services and investments. An agreement on Trade in Goods and other provisions relating to Rules of Origin, Operational Certification Procedures and agreement on Customs Cooperation was finalised in Jun 2009 at 18th Trade Negotiating Committee (**TNC**) meeting in Phuket. **19th TNC** was held in Bangkok in Feb 2011. India has exchanged its tariff preference schedules with member countries.

12. The 6th meeting of BIMSTEC Business and Economic Forum were held in Feb 2011 in Bangkok. India hosted a Business Summit meeting in Nov 2008 in association with CII, FICCI, and ASSOCHAM. India hosts an annual Integrating BIMSTEC Seminar held in the North East (Shillong 2013, Imphal 2014). To facilitate business travel among BIMSTEC member countries, three meetings of the Expert Group have been held on BIMSTEC Visa Scheme.

Cultural Cooperation (Bhutan)

13. Members are expected to sign MoU on establishment of BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) and BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO), Bhutan during 3rd Summit. India hosted the 1st Expert Group Meeting BCIC&O in 2006 in New Delhi. The first BIMSTEC Ministerial meeting on Culture was held in Paro, Bhutan in May 2006.

Energy (Myanmar)

14. Thailand hosted BIMSTEC Regional Workshop and Study Visit on Bio-Fuels Production and Utilization in Jun 2012 in Bangkok. Ministry of Power hosted 4th meeting of Task Force on

Power Exchange in Jan 2013 in New Delhi which discussed the draft text of MOU on Grid Inter-connection. Meeting of Energy Ministers took place in Oct 2005 in New Delhi and in March 4-5, 2010 in Bangkok, Thailand.

15. India also hosted Task Force Meeting in Feb 2011 in Bengaluru and SOM in Feb 2011 in New Delhi on operationalisation of BIMSTEC Energy Centre (MOA signed during 13th MM). A land for the Centre has been allocated in premises of Central Power Research Institute, Bengaluru.

Agriculture (Myanmar)

16. Sri Lanka hosted the 3rd meeting on Agriculture in Kandy in Nov 2010. Earlier, at the 2nd Expert Group Meeting held in New Delhi in Apr 2008, nine priority areas (*along with lead countries*), were finalised; India will lead in Prevention and control of transboundary animal diseases (**India**); Affiliation of Universities/Research Institutions (**India**); Development of agricultural biotechnology including bio-safety (**India**); Development of Seeds (**India**).

Poverty Alleviation (Nepal)

17. Nepal hosted the 2nd Ministerial Meeting in Jan 2012 in Kathmandu where Plan of Poverty Alleviation was adopted.

Technology (Sri Lanka)

18. Sri Lanka hosted the 3rd meeting on May 9-10, 2011 in Colombo on establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Exchange Facility. The meeting discussed the draft Concept Paper.

Fisheries (Thailand)

19. Thailand organized a training programme on Advance Aquatic Plants Tissue Culture in Aug 2013 in Bangkok.

Public Health (Thailand)

20. Deptt. Of AYUSH in association with MEA hosted two Workshops on IPR issues and Regulatory issues in Traditional Medicines in October 2011 in New Delhi. Since 2005, India has granted 30 slots of AYUSH scholarships to study in India in the fields of traditional medicine in undergraduate, post-graduate and doctorate programs.

21. Thailand hosted 2nd meeting of Network of National centres of Coordination in Traditional Medicine in Aug 2010 in Nonthaburi; Institute of PG Teaching and Research in Ayurveda (IPGTRA), Jamnagar is the Indian nominee.

People-to-People Contact (Thailand)

23. At India offers 1440 (Civilian), 274 (Defence) and 18 slots in NDC & DSSC under ITEC programme to BIMSTEC countries and the utilisation is almost 1200. India has set up BIMSTEC Network of Think Tanks with RIS as nodal agency. RIS hosted a two-day meeting of think tanks on 12-13 Feb, 2010.

Climate Change (Bangladesh)

24. Bangladesh will be circulating a concept paper on cooperation in this area soon.