

# BIMSTEC Newsletter

A Monthly Newsletter from BIMSTEC

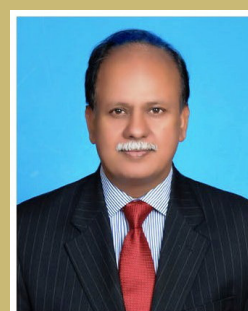


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BIMSTEC Special

## ‘Focus on priority areas for faster progress’

In this edition of Newsletter, **H.E. Mr Kazi Imtiaz Hossain**, Ambassador of Bangladesh to Thailand, shares his views on BIMSTEC with us. In a long and distinguished career as a diplomat, he has served with distinction in New York, Kolkata, Geneva and Beijing, apart from terms in Dhaka. Prior to his current assignment, he was responsible for BIMSTEC matters among others as Director General in Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka.



**Q. While you became part of BIMSTEC Working Group (BWG) recently after taking up your assignment here, you have been associated for long with BIMSTEC activities. What are your views on BIMSTEC?**

**A.** Indeed, I have had the privilege of being associated with two most promising regional groups in which Bangladesh is a member- one is SAARC and the other BIMSTEC while I was in the capital. And now as Ambassador in Bangkok, it is gratifying for me to remain associated with one of the grouping as a member of BIMSTEC Working Group in Bangkok. It is rightly said that BIMSTEC serves as the bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia - the two most economically promising regions of the world. Combining the economic and social potentials of the two regions the forum offers the platform for building long-lasting partnership for sustainable economic development and expanding and strengthening cooperation for the mutual benefits of the Member States. In the 13 years since its establishment, the forum has been able to lay down the basic foundation for cooperation in some core areas. We now need to build upon them to harness the true potentials of cooperation. The commitment and determination of the Member States that I have witnessed during my association in this grouping makes me greatly optimistic about the success of BIMSTEC regional integration in South and Southeast Asia thereby contributing to economic development and social emancipation of the Member States.

**Q. What according to you, have been achievements of BIMSTEC so far and what should be the priorities for its future work?**

**A.** It is true that the list of achievements in BIMSTEC has not been long, but it is impressive in terms of substance and the areas in which they have come. Apart from the MOUs for the setting of the Energy Centre, the Climate and Weather Centre and the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) and BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO) which are ready for signature, the signing of the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking and the endorsement by all Member States of the BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistic Study (BTILS) have been commendable. Similarly, there has been noteworthy progress in such areas as agriculture and fisheries, tourism and in poverty alleviation.

One of the inhibiting factors in achieving greater and faster progress in BIMSTEC, I think is the absence of a permanent institutional body that could service the organization in a systematic and effective manner. I would thus tend to rank the establishment of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat as the top most

priority issue before the Group. I believe, with the establishment of the Secretariat, the work of this body would gain tremendous momentum and we should be able to witness visible progress in each of the identified areas of cooperation. As you would know Bangladesh has offered to host the Secretariat in Dhaka and if given the responsibility, we would be most gratified to shoulder it. In terms of other substantive issues, while we feel that all the 14 core areas of identified cooperation are equally important for the member states. We may however, need to take step by step approach and concentrate on a few areas in order to make faster and visible progress in BIMSTEC. In line with that approach, priority attention may be accorded to establishing intra-regional linkage and connectivity, energy, expediting BIMSTEC FTA for goods, services and investment, strengthening cooperation to address climate change, enhancing cooperation in ICT and e-Governance, meeting food security challenges etc. Progress at a faster pace in these areas would create an enabling environment for building longer term partnership amongst the Member States for sustainable development and peace and prosperity of the region as a whole.

**Q. Bangladesh is the lead country for Trade and Investment and Climate Change in BIMSTEC. What cooperation activities you envisage in these areas?**

**A.** These are two most important areas of cooperation in BIMSTEC. It is most gratifying for Bangladesh as a lead country to see negotiations on BIMSTEC FTA in Trade in Goods and Services reach final stage. Bangladesh would be hosting the next BIMSTEC Trade Ministers Meeting in Dhaka where we expect the Agreement to be concluded. We are awaiting conclusion of the negotiations before announcing a date for the Trade Ministers meeting. It is beyond any debate that climate change poses a grievous and long term economic and social challenge to the entire humanity. BIMSTEC member states are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and we expect that we can better address the challenges through our collective efforts. We believe, BIMSTEC is rightly placed in creating an effective platform for sharing of knowledge, understanding and technology to combat this menace comprehensively. In the coming days, Bangladesh would be working closely with the Member States to chart out an effective plan of action which could complement global efforts in combating climate change.

**Q. Bangladesh is a member of several regional organizations. What place it sees for BIMSTEC in the matrix of regional cooperation?**

**A.** Regional cooperation constitutes a core element in our foreign policy. In this era of globalization, we believe that economic well-being and social development of a country could be better achieved through collective endeavours. This philosophy has guided our approach to regionalism. BIMSTEC bridges the two developing regions of Asia, epitomizing South-South cooperation. Commonality of interest, cultural, linguistic and philosophical affinities of the members place this organization in a unique position to transform the economic and social landscape of our countries. As one of the founding members of BIMSTEC thus Bangladesh has great faith and confidence in the success of the regional body.

### **Strengthening border trade between North East India and Myanmar**

A Seminar on 'Strengthening Border Trade between North East India and Myanmar: The way forward' was jointly organized in Mandalay on 16 September 2010 by the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) and Mandalay Region Commerce and Industry, with participation from a trade delegation from North-East Indian states. Deputy Minister for Commerce Mr. U Aung Tun attended the seminar. From the Indian side, Mr. Mani Shanker Aiyar, Member of Parliament, and Mr. L. Sailo, Minister of Trade of Mizoram, were present along with several Indian entrepreneurs. The Indian delegation also met with Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation Mr. U Htay Oo to discuss agricultural cooperation. (Source: Embassy of Myanmar, Bangkok)

## Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina receives award for Bangladesh's MDG achievements

Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina received the MDG Award for Bangladesh's outstanding performance in achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in reducing child mortality by 50 percent. The award was conferred upon Bangladesh and five other countries on September 19, 2010, a day ahead of the MDG conference on the sidelines of the 65th UN General Assembly. The award committee honoured Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's leadership in spearheading a campaign for achieving the MDGs. While receiving the award, she said that the award would encourage Bangladesh in strengthening its efforts for achieving all MDGs by 2015 despite the adverse impacts of recent global economic crisis and climate change. Besides Bangladesh, Nepal also received an MDG Award for significantly improving maternal health. *(Source: Embassy of Bangladesh, Bangkok)*



## BIMSTEC Events

### 2nd BIMSTEC Meeting on Network of National Centers of Coordination in Traditional Medicine

The 2nd BIMSTEC Meeting on the Network of National Centers of Coordination in Traditional Medicine was hosted by Thailand in Nonthaburi on 30-31 August 2010. It was attended by delegates from Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Representative from WHO's South-East Asia Region and related organizations in Thailand also attended as observers. Delegates presented country reports on 'Traditional/herbal medicinal products: production standard, regulation, and registration' in the meeting. They also discussed four proposals (i) Developing a document on Traditional Systems of Medicine of BIMSTEC countries (ii) Knowledge management and information sharing on traditional medicine including pharmacopoeial drug safety and protection of traditional medicine knowledge and intellectual capital, (iii) Collaborative research on traditional medicine among BIMSTEC countries and (iv) Mutual recognition of traditional systems of medicine related issues, for further collaboration within BIMSTEC framework.

### BIMSTEC International Training Programme on Ornamental Aquatic Plants Propagation

The Department of Fisheries of Thailand hosted the BIMSTEC International Training Programme on Ornamental Aquatic Plants Propagation during 1-28 August 2010. Experts and representatives from relevant agencies of member countries participated in the programme consisting of lectures, demonstrations in laboratory facilities and field visits to aquatic plant farms. The programme provided excellent training on propagation of ornamental aquatic plants, and served as platform for networking and exchange of information for field researchers.



## Small and effective development projects in Bhutan

A total of 641 small development projects are to be implemented across Bhutan as part of the 10th Five Year Plan (FYP) under the Small Development Programme (SDP). Projects being considered for financial year 2010-2011 consist of local government's prioritized plans and were received from all the 20 Dzongkhags with total approved outlay of Nu 2248.039 million for in 2010-2011. The SDP programme is being implemented with Government of India assistance worth Nu 7,000 million. "The Small Development Programme is the funding windows for development projects in Bhutan and it essentially targets the development projects in the rural areas," said Tenzin R. Wangchuk, Deputy Chief Officer for Asia Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Under the SDP funding windows, development projects can be proposed without any restriction within the range of Nu 30 million. Activities mainly comprise rural water supply schemes, construction of irrigation channels, farm roads, renewable natural resources centers, outreach clinics, gewog meeting halls and other infrastructure. Of the 641 projects, construction of farm roads tops the list. (Source: Bhutan Times article by Pema Choki)

## ADB to assist with improving road connectivity in Sri Lanka

ADB is to provide US\$ 154.4 million to implement the Northern Road Connectivity Project in Sri Lanka. Government is to contribute US \$ 18.6 million for the project that would improve road connectivity within the Northern Province and between the Northern Province and the Southern region, Rehabilitation and improvement of about 170 km of National Highways comprising 108 km in Northern Province and 62 km in North Central Province; rehabilitation of about 140 km of provincial roads and selected bridges is to be done under the project ( Source: Govt. of Sri Lanka)

## News in photos



One of the three new lines of Delhi metro that opened recently for 19th Commonwealth Games. The expanded metro network (190 km) would greatly help mass rapid urban transport in the city.

(Photo: Hindustan Times)

## Contact us

The BIMSTEC Newsletter has been compiled on behalf of BIMSTEC Working Group by Embassy of India, Bangkok. For further information, feedback, or events to be covered in the newsletter, please contact us at: [pol.bangkok@mea.gov.in](mailto:pol.bangkok@mea.gov.in)