

BIMSTEC Newsletter

A Monthly Newsletter from BIMSTEC



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BIMSTEC Special

Building an interconnected BIMSTEC

This issue of Newsletter brings to you an exclusive interview with **H.E. Mr. Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty**, Ambassador of India to Thailand. In a long and distinguished career as a diplomat, Mr. Chakravarty has served several terms in Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, the previous one being as Chief of Protocol, as well as in India's Missions in Cairo, Jeddah, London, Karachi (as Consul General), Tel Aviv and Dhaka. He served as India's ambassador to Bangladesh prior to taking up his current assignment.



Q: You enjoy a long association and unique perspective on BIMSTEC, having served as India's ambassador to Bangladesh prior to your current assignment. What are your impressions of BIMSTEC?

I believe BIMSTEC is an important framework for regional cooperation. It reflects the political will of the seven member countries to come together in a common quest to bring development and prosperity to their people. Our people are neighbours and share civilisational links. They are increasingly aware of our interdependence and inter-linkages and consequently, desire closer cooperation. Government of India remains deeply committed to pursue cooperation under the BIMSTEC framework.

Since BIMSTEC came into being, we've been able to develop networks of experts and institutions in a number of important areas. These have helped capacity building, sharing of experience and best practices among our interconnected agencies. For example, a network of think-tanks has been established to help exchange of ideas and thoughts on issues of regional import. The first meeting of this network was hosted by India's think tank Research and Information System (RIS) in Delhi in February this year. Thailand and Sri Lanka have recently hosted similar meetings in traditional medicine and agriculture respectively. India is also offering 450 scholarships to member countries to encourage greater exchange of technical know-how.

Greater connectivity, energy security, increased trade & investment, agriculture, tourism, environment, technology cooperation and security are among the focus areas under BIMSTEC. If we can make quick progress on key challenges such as enhancing inter-regional connectivity and trade, it would be a major step forward in realizing our objectives to build a strong interconnected, cooperative and prosperous BIMSTEC region.

Q. An Energy Centre for member countries is planned to be established in India. Could you tell us more about it?

A Memorandum of Association between BIMSTEC member countries for establishing a BIMSTEC Energy Centre has been finalized, though not yet signed. *(Contd. on next page)*

We are very happy to have the opportunity to host the Energy Centre in India. The Centre would work on ways to enhance regional cooperation on energy issues. Ensuring availability of energy in sufficient quantities and environmental friendly manner is necessary to meet development needs of all members. There is an obvious potential for regional cooperation on energy among BIMSTEC countries in terms of matching of availability of resources and demand/use. There are several complementarities which can be mutually beneficial. To promote cooperation in this sector, India hosted the 1st BIMSTEC Energy Ministers' Meeting in 2005 in New Delhi, and has organized several workshops and training modules on issues such as harmonization of Grid standards, hydro power, renewable energy technologies, bio-energy, and standards and labeling. The Centre would continue such collaborative effort, and I hope its early establishment would catalyze new initiatives for cooperation in this sector.

Q. Does BIMSTEC have any special relevance for North-Eastern states of India?

Indeed, it does. India's North-eastern states, owing to their geographic proximity to many BIMSTEC countries, provide a unique link between these countries and other regions of India. The potential to expand not just trade, but tourism, people-to-people contact etc, is enormous. Key challenge here is to develop connectivity. It is in this context that projects such the trilateral highway and improvement of border infrastructure become quite important. There is a need to speed up implementation on ground of these projects.

Q. What are your views on having a Permanent Secretariat for BIMSTEC?

The BIMSTEC Working Group that meets regularly in Bangkok for follow up on various BIMSTEC initiatives has kept up the momentum so far. There is much on the "To Do" menu that requires sustained work on an institutional basis. The need for a Permanent Secretariat has therefore sharpened. We hope that it would be possible to finalize modalities of the Secretariat soon, so that it can be established as soon as possible.

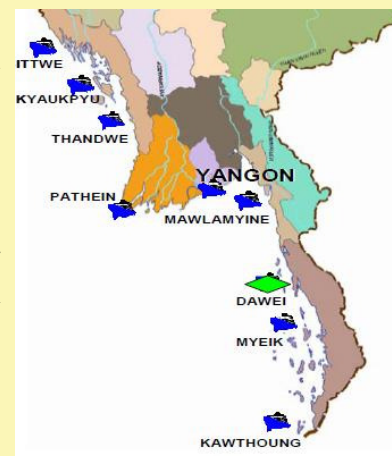
ADB to assist rural electrification in Bhutan

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a grant of \$ 21.6 million for the Bhutan Rural Renewable Energy Development Project. The grant will help provide electricity to all rural households. According to ADB, full electrification will not only address rising local energy demand and national energy security but will also help diversify income-earning activities and improve the quality of life and standard of living in rural areas. At present, the government has provided electricity to around 60 percent of rural households, and the figure is expected to reach 84 percent by 2012. The new grant assistance will help the government cover the remaining households through a mix of on-grid and off-grid power supplies. The project assistance is aimed at providing on-grid electricity to more than 5,000 households and solar power packs for 1,900 homes that are located in remote areas. It will also help upgrade systems for the existing 2,500 solar power users. The grant will also fund pilot projects for wind power and biogas fuel. The energy department is the executing agency for the project, which is scheduled to be completed by June 2015 (*Source: Bhutan Observer*)



Thai company ITD to develop Dawei port in Myanmar

Italian-Thai Development (ITD), a major Thai construction company, signed on November 2, 2010, a Framework Agreement with the Myanmar Port Authority, Ministry of Transport of the Union of Myanmar, to develop the Dawei deep sea port, industrial estate and road link to Thailand. Under the project, the company has been granted a Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) concession to develop in Dawei a deep sea port, an industrial estate and heavy industries such as a steel mill, fertilizer plant, power plant and other utility services, a cross-border road, rail and pipeline link from the designated area in Dawei district to Thailand at Pu Nam Ron, Kanchanaburi province, a township for residential and commercial development and a tourism, resort and recreation complex. The Project is expected to make Dawei a major logistic and trading hub in the region.



(Source: ITD, Graphic: ADB)

Sri Lanka hosts 3rd BIMSTEC Expert Group Meeting on agricultural cooperation

The 3rd BIMSTEC Expert Group meeting on Agricultural Cooperation was held recently in Kandy, Sri Lanka on November 22-23, 2010. Nine priority areas have been identified in previous two meetings for cooperation in agriculture. These areas are - prevention and control of trans-boundary animal diseases; affiliation of universities and research institutions; development of agricultural biotechnology including bio-safety; development of seed sector; improving agricultural trade and investment; collaboration in R&D of power generation & utilisation of alternative energy crops to promote cost effective bio-fuel production at community level; strengthening of agriculture statistical information system and its networks; developing good agricultural practices including organic farming; and private sector participation, especially in value chain management. Experts from all member countries came together to discuss collaboration and joint projects in these priority areas. (Photo: Embassy of Sri Lanka, Bangkok)



Conserving birthplace of Lord Buddha

With Nepal set to inaugurate **Nepal Tourism Year 2011**, the country has partnered with UNESCO and government of Japan to conserve Lumbini, the place of Lord Buddha's birth in 623 B.C., a world famous pilgrimage destination and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1997. Continuing Government of Nepal's measures to keep archeological sites in and around Lumbini related to Lord Buddha's life intact and well conserved, the project would focus on conserving Ashoka Pillar, the Marker Stone, the Nativity Sculpture and the Sacred Garden.



(Source: Embassy of Nepal, Bangkok)

Mayadevi Temple, the sacred place of Lord Buddha's birth

Eight power projects get go-ahead in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase recently approved award of eight power projects, including three big plants, to generate 1,232 megawatts (mw) of electricity. Five of these power plants are quick rental projects with a total capacity to generate 340 mw of electricity. Local company Summit Industrial and Mercantile Corporation would generate 676 mw of electricity from two big power projects -- Bibiyana-II 341 mw gas fired power plant and Meghnaghat 335 mw dual fuel power project. The company had recently also obtained approval to build Bibiyana 450 mw gas fired combined cycle power plant. It is to enter into a joint venture with GE Energy LLC to build the three power plants.

(Source: The Financial Express)

Common entry tickets for monuments in India for BIMSTEC nationals

To facilitate access of tourists from BIMSTEC & SAARC countries to a large number of monuments in India showcasing rich cultural heritage of India and the region, the Archaeological Survey of India has introduced a unified entry ticket system. Under the scheme, one common entrance ticket for 14 UNESCO World Heritage Sites has been introduced, along with another common entry ticket for other ticketed monuments, and a specially designated one for Taj Mahal. Prices for these common entry tickets for BIMSTEC & SAARC visitors have been kept at par with ticket prices for Indian nationals. Visitors can buy these tickets at over 250 designated outlets. These are also available for bulk purchase in advance by hotels, travel agents and tour operators for use by their clients. More details on the scheme are available at www.asi.nic.in

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