



BIMSTEC Newsletter

A Monthly Newsletter from BIMSTEC Centre

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Message From the Chair

*“ We decided
to designate
6 June as
'BIMSTEC
Day'
to mark the
establishment
of BIMSTEC”*

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MESSAGE FROM H.E. MS. LATHA REDDY, AMBASSADOR OF INDIA (BIMSTEC WORKING GROUP CHAIR)

As the Chair of the BIMSTEC Working Group (BWG), I have great pleasure in sharing my thoughts on BIMSTEC on the occasion of the 11th anniversary of the BIMSTEC.

It was more than a decade ago in June 1997 that Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand initiated the BIMSTEC process here in Bangkok. Myanmar joined later that year and Nepal and Bhutan joined in 2004. The grouping, which brings South and South East Asia closer, has come to be appropriately called the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.

BIMSTEC is emerging as an important framework for regional cooperation reflecting the political will of the seven countries to come together to equip their peoples to benefit from the opportunities offered by rapid globalization as also to jointly address common challenges. Our peoples are neighbours and share civilisational links. We have become increasingly aware of the mutual interdependence and interlinkages between our economies and societies and the potential benefits of closer cooperation.

We in the BIMSTEC have come a long way since 1997. Cooperation networks have been formed in a number of important areas. Regular interactions are being held at various levels. One Summit, six Ministerial meetings and eleven senior officials' meetings have been held so far. A number of other important sectoral Ministerial/expert level meetings have been held.

Issues such as greater connectivity, energy security, increased trade & investment, agriculture, tourism, environment, technology cooperation and security are all among the focus areas of active ongoing cooperation under the BIMSTEC framework. Many of these issues are interlinked and progress in all these areas would directly benefit the peoples of all our countries. It is a win-win situation. Serious beginnings have been made and we look forward to a rapid realization of our goals.

Our Ministers and Senior Officials are due to meet in New Delhi in August to discuss a whole range of issues. Increased transport linkages which will benefit business, tourism and people-to-people contacts; trade facilitation through a possible FTA; cooperation in the fields of energy; tourism; counter-terrorism and the establishment of a Permanent Secretariat are among some of the issues that are likely to come up for discussion.

Later this year we will have the second BIMSTEC Summit in New Delhi. This would be another important milestone in providing direction to the future work of BIMSTEC as our political leaders at the highest levels will meet and take important decisions on the way forward for BIMSTEC.

I would like to thank all BWG members and the BIMSTEC Centre for their active participation and cooperation in our regular deliberations over the years (the 80th meeting was held last month), which has played a useful role in focusing attention on key issues of interest and to monitor progress.

Regional Workshop and Study Visit on Biomass Gasification for Power Production under BIMSTEC Cooperation



H.E. Ms. Latha Reddy, The Chair of BIMSTEC Working Group

The Regional Workshop and Study Visit on Biomass Gasification for Power Production under BIMSTEC Cooperation was successfully held during 13-14 May 2008. It was organised by the Department of Alternative Energy Development and Efficiency (DEDE), Ministry of Energy of Thailand. The workshop was held at the Royal Princess Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand on the first day. The second day was the study visit to Three Stage Gasification System in Pathum Thani province and rice mill in Chai Nat province.



The Workshop on the first day (13 May 2008) at Royal Princess Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

The Study Visit on the second day (14 May 2008); The first visit was the Three Stage Gasification System in Pathum Thani province; The second visit was the rice mill in Chai Nat province



The 11th Anniversary of BIMSTEC

On 6 June 1998, four countries established a new regional group in Bangkok and named it: BISTEC – Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation. Myanmar joined the group as a full member in 1997, upon which the name of the group was changed to BIMST-EC. Nepal and Bhutan joined in 2004, the group's name was changed to the 'Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation', BIMSTEC.

This 6 June 2008, BIMSTEC will celebrate its 11th anniversary. Over the past eleven years, BIMSTEC has grown into a viable organization and played a significant role as a bridge between Southeast Asian and South Asian countries. BIMSTEC brings together 1.3 billion people –21 percent of the world population, a combined GDP of US\$750 billion, and a considerable amount of complementarities. BIMSTEC also serves as a strategic link of cooperation in the frameworks of ASEAN, GMS and ACMECS.



Updates from BIMSTEC Working Group

Senior Officials' Meeting and Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation will be held on 8-9 July 2008 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The BIMSTEC Meeting on Poverty Alleviation is going to be held after the ninth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting which convened in New Delhi on 9 August 2006. At the New Delhi Meeting, Nepal offered to be the lead country for this section. Bangladesh offered to host the First Ministerial Meeting. The Bangladesh's proposal was approved because of her vast experience with poverty alleviation initiatives such as the micro-credit. In addition, Thailand offered to share "Sufficiency Economy" philosophy, a successful model initiated by His Majesty the King of Thailand, to combating poverty. The forthcoming Ministerial Meeting would adopt a comprehensive plan of action in keeping with the development goals.

BIMSTEC Upcoming Activities

Date	Activity	Venue
24 June 2008	81 st BWG Meeting	MFA
8 July 2008	Senior Officials' Meeting on Poverty Alleviation	Dhaka
9 July 2008	Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation	Dhaka
27-28 August 2008	Senior Officials' Meeting	New Delhi
29 August 2008	Ministerial Meeting	New Delhi
11-12 November 2008	2 nd BIMSTEC Summit	New Delhi

The Royal Ploughing Ceremony, Thailand

The Royal Ploughing Ceremony is an ancient Brahminical rite dating back to the Sukhothai period (1257 - 1350 A.D.) The ceremony heralds the start of the new rice-growing season. It is undertaken to assure a successful planting season and an abundance of the nation's crops.

This year, the Royal Ploughing Ceremony was held on 9 May 2008 at the Royal Ground, Thailand. It began with the Lord of the Harvest (the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives) performing a rite to predict the amount of rainfall in the coming season by selecting one of three pieces of cloth of varying lengths. Then, he began to plough the field and sow the rice seeds from the baskets carried by the Celestial Maidens.



At the end of the Ploughing Ceremony, the ceremonial oxen are led to troughs, each contain one of seven different offerings of food and drink namely, paddy, green beans, maize, hay, sesame seed, water and liquor. Predictions regarding the success of the harvest and the abundance of particular crops in the coming season are determined by the items selected. This year, the sacred oxen ate rice and grass which led the Brahmin seers to predict that there would be abundance of food and average water this year.

Many Thais who attended the ceremony hoped to gather a few sacred rice grains scattered by the Lord of Harvest since they believe the grains are blessed. These are either mixed with the farmer's own rice stock to ensure a good crop in the coming year, or simply kept as a token of good luck.

For further information on activities and programs of BIMSTEC, please contact:

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