



Vivekananda
International
Foundation



Bay of Bengal Initiative
for Multi-Sectoral Technical
and Economic Cooperation

4th BIMSTEC Track 1.5 Security Dialogue



REPORT

REPORT

4th BIMSTEC Track 1.5 Security Dialogue

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Foreword

Amidst shifting geopolitical dynamics, economic interdependencies, and the rise of non-traditional security threats, strengthening regional cooperation in security has become paramount for ensuring a peaceful, stable, and resilient Bay of Bengal region. In this context, the 4th BIMSTEC Track 1.5 Security Dialogue, convened at the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) on 6–7 May 2025, was both timely and relevant.

Held shortly after the landmark Sixth BIMSTEC Summit in April 2025, the Dialogue came at a moment of promise and peril. The Summit marked a turning point in BIMSTEC’s institutional evolution, with the operationalisation of the BIMSTEC Charter and the adoption of the Bangkok Vision 2030. These documents laid out a strategic roadmap for deepening regional cooperation. Yet, the Dialogue also followed a tragic terrorist attack on 22 April 2025 in Pahalgam, Kashmir—claiming 26 lives, including one Nepali national—reminding us of the urgent need for collective regional responses to both traditional and non-traditional security threats.

Historically, the Bay of Bengal has been a conduit of knowledge, trade, and maritime linkages. That legacy must now be revived to build adaptive, anticipatory frameworks for regional resilience. This requires not only political will but also the nurturing of intellectual ecosystems that support trust-building and strategic foresight. India, as a founding member of BIMSTEC, remains committed to strengthening the grouping as a pillar of regional peace and prosperity. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s proposals at the Sixth Summit—including a BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce, hackathons, scholarships, and regional Games—aim to nurture a deeper sense of community and shared destiny across the Bay of Bengal.

The 4th edition of the BIMSTEC Track 1.5 Security Dialogue track built on the momentum of earlier editions of the think tanks dialogue track hosted by VIF in 2018 and 2019. This year’s discussions revealed strong convergence on the need to reinforce institutional mechanisms, invest in technological capabilities,

and shape norms grounded in regional realities. We were delighted that senior officials and academics from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand attended the conference with enthusiasm contributing useful ideas and suggestions.

In-depth discussions were held on security themes are vital for BIMSTEC countries. A host of recommendations emerged out of the in-depth discussion held at the Security Dialogue. We hope that BIMSTEC Secretariat will circulate them among member countries for their consideration. These recommendations compliment the work of BIMSTEC.

A Summary of Recommendations has been provided in this report. To mention a few, the participants recommended adoption of a BIMSTEC Maritime Security Charter, A BIMSTEC Maritime Security Task Force, and a Joint Intelligence Sharing Platform in so far as strengthening maritime security in the Bay of Bengal is concerned.

In the area of economic security and connectivity, the participants recommended a BIMSTEC regional supply chain mechanism and a BIMSTEC energy corridor. They also felt that there should be institutionalised BIMSTEC Economic Security Dialogue.

Regional cooperation is vital for tackling transnational organised crime. Experts recommended establishment of a BIMSTEC Transnational Crime Coordination Centre for real-time intelligence sharing, joint operation and policy alignment. Engagement of youths in crime prevention through awareness campaign, digital literacy programme and start up incentive has been recommended.

In the area of cyber security, the conference has recommended a series of recommendation including establishment of a BIMSTEC CERT-to-CERT network and joint cyber defence exercises and a cyber security rapid response task force.

To facilitate better cooperation, setting up of nodal point in relevant institution of member countries, joint patrolling at the border, involvement of communities and youths in BIMSTEC programmes was recommended.

In the last session, the participants reflected on the importance of Track II dialogues for stronger BIMSTEC cooperation. The participants recommended strengthening of BIMSTEC Secretariat and its institutional capacity so that it can play its role as a facilitator for regional cooperation and decision implementation. The importance of training, skill building and capacity creation in the implementing agencies was emphasised. A key recommendation was the creation of a BIMSTEC centre for strategic studies, a Track II think tank hub and establishment of a BIMSTEC knowledge and policy network for joint research, policy exchange and capacity building.

In the end, strong political will and commitment from all member countries would be required to strengthen BIMSTEC and implement its programmes efficiently and expeditiously

As the conference demonstrated, much has been achieved—but much more remains to be done. The participants were unanimous that dialogue amongst BIMSTEC countries at official and non-official levels must continue. BIMSTEC must address the real problems faced by the people. They ought to be strong focus on issues of the youth. The spirit of BIMSTEC lies in transforming shared vulnerabilities into shared strategies. Implementation of the recommendations must be improved. The Vivekananda International Foundation remains committed to facilitating thought leadership, research collaboration, and policy innovation for the region.

Dr Arvind Gupta

Director, Vivekananda International Foundation

Editor's Note

As the strategic significance of the Bay of Bengal region steadily rises, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is emerging as a vital platform for shaping the contours of regional cooperation. Founded in 1997, BIMSTEC brings together seven countries—Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand—bound not only by geography but by shared aspirations for peace, stability, and prosperity. Representing nearly one-fifth of the world's population and a combined GDP of over \$5 trillion, this grouping has grown in importance as both traditional and non-traditional security challenges increasingly transcend national borders. Against the backdrop of shifting geopolitical alignments, rising economic interdependence, and evolving threats in the Bay of Bengal littoral, BIMSTEC's role in anchoring regional resilience has become more relevant than ever.

Against this backdrop, the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) convened the 4th Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue in New Delhi on 6–7 May 2025. The Dialogue aimed to deepen understanding and cooperation on shared regional security priorities in a fast-changing strategic environment marked by economic interdependencies, transnational threats, and rapid technological disruptions. The forum brought together a diverse group of experts, policymakers, and strategic thinkers from across BIMSTEC countries to deliberate on five key interlinked themes: Maritime Security, Economic Security and Connectivity, Tackling Transnational Organized Crime, Cybersecurity and Emerging Technologies, and the Role of Track 2 Dialogues in Reinforcing Regional Cohesion.

The 4th Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue reaffirmed the shared understanding that regional security in the Bay of Bengal cannot be disaggregated from broader economic, environmental, and technological challenges. As BIMSTEC pivots towards more outcome-oriented cooperation, the ideas generated at this dialogue can serve as both compass and catalyst. The proposed institutional mechanisms—be it joint task forces, coordination centres, or strategic policy hubs—are essential to transform dialogue into durable

action. At the same time, building regional trust and resilience will require sustained political commitment, policy innovation, and active engagement from multiple stakeholders—governments, academia, civil society, and the private sector alike.

As the BIMSTEC region navigates an era marked by uncertainty and opportunity, it is our hope that this report serves not only as a documentation of rich deliberations but also as a springboard for collaborative action. With a sharpened strategic focus and a spirit of regional solidarity, BIMSTEC can emerge not just as a forum of intent but as an engine of security and prosperity in the Bay of Bengal and beyond.

Ms Prerna Gandhi
Associate Fellow
Vivekananda International Foundation

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MESSAGE

I congratulate the Vivekanand International Foundation (VIF) for bringing out the book titled "Beyond Boundaries: Cooperation in the BIMSTEC Framework" during the 4th Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue in New Delhi in May 2025. It is an opportune moment to take forward discussions on BIMSTEC's core founding principles of security, commerce, connectivity, energy and people-to-people exchanges.

We are witnessing increasing uncertainty and tensions in the global geo-political environment. Digital dependency and use of advanced technologies for perpetuating cyber-crimes and financial frauds are impacting people across international boundaries. Rising populations and energy needs are accentuating the pressure on trans-boundary water systems like the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Mekong. This has increased the salience of regional cooperative mechanisms.

BIMSTEC has emerged as a significant platform for fostering regional cooperation, economic integration and connectivity. Improved intelligence-sharing mechanisms, cooperation in predictive and emerging technologies and establishment of joint task forces are essential to mitigate the challenges of drug and human trafficking, gun running, money laundering and cyber-crime. Additionally, resilient trans-national mechanisms for preparing and responding to natural disasters is gaining urgency.

In the above backdrop, this book contains several valuable suggestions to deepen regional trade and commerce, deal with traditional and non-traditional security threats. I am sanguine that the book will enhance awareness and complement governmental efforts to boost intra-regional cooperation through the BIMSTEC Framework.

I compliment Director VIF and his team for their dedicated efforts in publishing the book and organizing this Track 1.5 Dialogue. I wish the participants all the best in their endeavor to strengthen BIMSTEC.

(Ajit Doval)



Secretary General

Secretariat
Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral
Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)

Message

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) has emerged as a vital platform for regional collaboration in Bay of Bengal region, aimed at fulfilling the shared aspirations of its member States for peace, prosperity and sustainable development. Since its inception in June 1997 as a regional platform for technical and economic cooperation, there has been expansion in BIMSTEC's Agenda for regional cooperation, reflecting the developmental priorities of the member States. It has now its own Charter and well-established institutional mechanisms, including Summits and Ministerial mechanisms. BIMSTEC works on the basis of consensus amongst its member States and it has ensured equal role for all the member States through adopting the unique system of making its member States as Lead States for forging cooperation in specific sectors. BIMSTEC's commitment to staying away from political issues has enabled it to stay focused on developmental agenda of the member States and achieve significant progress in forging regional cooperation. The success of BIMSTEC is evident in conclusion of a number of Conventions and Agreements, setting up of specialised Centres and Facilities and delineation of sector specific Action Plans for expanding and deepening cooperation in various agreed areas on BIMSTEC's Agenda.

02. I am very happy over publication of this Collection of very informative and thoughtful essays "Beyond Boundaries: Cooperation in the BIMSTEC Framework". It is very comprehensive in its scope and presents a vivid picture of BIMSTEC in its various dimensions. It is very timely as it is being published just after the 6th BIMSTEC Summit (04 April 2025, Bangkok), which has provided a new momentum and direction to BIMSTEC, with adoption of, besides the Summit Declaration, BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030, which envisions a prosperous, resilient, and open BIMSTEC region, and the Report of the Eminent Persons' Group, which recommends specific steps to overcome institutional challenges. The signing of the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation at the Summit is being seen as a new milestone in boosting connectivity in Bay of Bengal Region. BIMSTEC has also taken initial steps to forge external partnerships with regional and international organisations such as IORA, IFPRI, WB and UNODC apart from expanding its long-standing partnership with ADB.

03. In the context of the ongoing churn in global politics and economy, including upheavals in global trade, the salience of regional organizations for realization of shared security and developmental goals has been recognised. The importance of BIMSTEC as a platform, which acts as a bridge between South Asia and South East Asia, for enhancing regional cooperation to deal with the contemporary security and developmental challenges in Bay of Bengal region has been underscored. I am confident that, with the ongoing reforms and revitalization and the abiding political commitment of its member States to its success, as expressed by BIMSTEC Leaders at the 6th Summit, BIMSTEC is set to emerge as a dynamic and vibrant regional organisation.

04. The need for a broad discourse on the future direction of BIMSTEC, with a view to redefine its priorities to deal with the new and emerging challenges, has been widely felt and I am confident that this Collection of essays "Beyond Boundaries: Cooperation in the BIMSTEC Framework" will serve this purpose very well. I wish it success in realizing this goal.

05. The BIMSTEC Secretariat is committed to work with the member States and other stakeholders in order to make regional cooperation in Bay of Bengal under BIMSTEC a great success.


(Indra Mani Pandey)

Concept Note

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional multilateral organization founded in 1997, comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Collectively, these nations represent approximately 1.8 billion people, nearly 22% of the global population, with a combined GDP of around \$5.2 trillion as of 2025. Over the years, BIMSTEC has become a significant platform for fostering regional cooperation, particularly in economic integration, connectivity, and security.

BIMSTEC's security landscape is evolving amidst shifting geopolitical dynamics, economic interdependencies, and the rise of non-traditional security threats. Strengthening regional cooperation will thus be crucial for ensuring a peaceful, stable, and resilient Bay of Bengal region. With the recent streamlining of cooperation areas from 14 to 7 sectors, including security—led by India—BIMSTEC has renewed its focus on addressing shared security challenges and enhancing regional resilience.

In keeping with this focus, the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) will be hosting the 4th Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue to help shape future security cooperation strategies for the BIMSTEC region. The dialogue will focus on the following key inter-connected themes: -

- Strengthening Maritime Security in the Bay of Bengal
- Economic Security and Connectivity in the Bay of Bengal Region
- Tackling Transnational Organized Crime Through Regional Cooperation
- Cyber Security Challenges and Emerging Technologies
- Harnessing Track 2 Dialogues for Stronger BIMSTEC Cooperation

The dialogue is aimed at discussing pressing security challenges, exploring opportunities for enhanced cooperation and generating policy recommendations to strengthen BIMSTEC's cooperation mechanisms.

It is proposed to be held on 06-07 May 2025 in New Delhi, India. The deliberations on the themes outlined above will be in the format of panel discussions with each panel comprising experts from member countries. Each session will have a moderator who will steer the conversation. Each speaker will have an initial 10 minutes to speak/ make their presentation and thereafter there will be an interactive session where the moderator may request the speakers to speak again/ respond to specific queries. This will be followed by opening the floor to the audience, time permitting, for a Q&A session.

Programme

Day 1 - 06 May 2025, Tuesday

Inaugural Session

1. Welcome Remarks by Dr **Arvind Gupta**, Director VIF (10 min).
2. Inaugural Address by Mr. **Indra Mani Pandey**, Secretary General, BIMSTEC (10 min).
3. Keynote Address by Mr. **Pavan Kapoor**, DNSA (SA), NSCS (10 min).

Book Release “**Beyond Boundaries: Cooperation in the BIMSTEC Framework**” (10 min) – *Heads of Delegation will be requested to join speakers on dais.*

Session 1- Strengthening Maritime Security in the Bay of Bengal

The Bay of Bengal is a vital maritime route for trade, energy, and regional security. BIMSTEC countries face threats like piracy, terrorism, illegal fishing, natural disasters and other environmental challenges. Strengthening maritime security requires enhanced maritime cooperation, information sharing, and capacity building. Joint initiatives like coordinated patrols and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) activities can improve disaster response and maritime safety and security. Collaborative efforts within BIMSTEC can ensure security of sea lanes, protect coastal environment, and promote economic growth, fostering regional prosperity and resilience.

- What specific policy measures can be adopted by BIMSTEC Member States to enhance maritime security in the Bay of Bengal region?
- What targeted strategies can BIMSTEC implement to counter illicit maritime activities in the Bay of Bengal?

- In what ways can BIMSTEC address unsustainable maritime practices to protect marine resources and ensure long-term security and sustainability in the Bay of Bengal?
- How can BIMSTEC fortify critical port infrastructure against both natural disasters and security threats such as terrorism and smuggling, ensuring resilience in the face of emerging risks?

Moderator: Vice Admiral **Sanjay Mahindru** (Retd), Former Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, Indian Navy.

Speakers:

1. Mr. **Htet Phyo Aung**, Deputy Director, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Myanmar.
2. Commander **Bhanu Abeygunawardhana**, Military Research Officer, Institute of National Security Studies of Sri Lanka - Ministry of Defence
3. Captain **Panuphun Rakkeo**, Management Director, Thailand-MECC Operations Centre, Thailand.
4. Captain **Anurag Bisen** (Retd), Senior Fellow, VIF, India.

Session 2- Economic Security and Connectivity in the Bay of Bengal Region

Economic Security is increasingly becoming a cornerstone of national security in today's world. It is important to apply an economic security lens to the BIMSTEC region's traditional focus on regional connectivity, trade and infrastructure development, in order to alleviate various concerns such as resource dependencies, lack of technical know-how, insufficient incentives for domestic manufacturing, and lack of intra-BIMSTEC connectivity. A common appreciation of these problems can enable the BIMSTEC region to identify opportunities for filling supply chain gaps, strengthen connectivity (including people-to-people transport and digital connectivity), and strengthen mutual economic ties through a whole of BIMSTEC approach.

- How can BIMSTEC countries develop resilient supply chains, both within BIMSTEC and outside, that mitigate risks from external disruptions, such as natural disasters, global economic crises and international geopolitics? What are the most important technologies and products for which supply chain resilience is absolutely key?
- How can BIMSTEC enhance trade facilitation through streamlined customs procedures, digital platforms, and reduced trade barriers to improve regional economic integration?
- What targeted measures can BIMSTEC adopt to strengthen financial integration, including harmonizing regulations, enhancing cross-border payments, and fostering investment flows across member states?
- What are the key challenges and opportunities in improving transportation connectivity within BIMSTEC? How can BIMSTEC enhance port infrastructure to support seamless regional trade and logistics?

Moderator: Mr. **Lekhan Thakkar**, Joint Secretary, NSCS.

Speakers:

1. Mr. **Md. Rafid Abrar Miah**, Research Officer, BIIS, Bangladesh.
2. Mr. **Dasho Karma Tshiteem**, Governing Board Member, RIGSS, Bhutan.
3. Mr. **Pharshu Ram Bhattarai**, Section Officer, MHA, Nepal.
4. Dr. **Constantino Xavier**, Senior Fellow, CSEP, India.

(Day 2 - 07 May 2025, Wednesday)

Session 3- Tackling Transnational Organized Crime Through Regional Cooperation

Transnational organized crime is a significant security threat in BIMSTEC countries, with the region's vast coastlines and porous borders facilitating drug trafficking, human trafficking, and arms smuggling. To combat these threats, regional cooperation is essential, involving improved intelligence-sharing, cross-border coordination, and joint task forces. Integrating advanced technologies such as data analytics, digital forensics, and predictive systems can further enhance detection and prevention efforts.

- What is the role of organized crime syndicates in financing arms smuggling, drug trafficking, and other illicit activities, and how can this be disrupted through regional cooperation?
- What are the most effective ways to enhance intelligence-sharing among BIMSTEC countries to combat drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, and money laundering?
- What are the challenges in tracing illicit funds across borders in the BIMSTEC region, and how can regional cooperation be strengthened to address these challenges?
- How can BIMSTEC member states improve training and capacity-building for law enforcement agencies to better handle the diverse and evolving challenges posed by transnational organized crime?

Moderator: Mr. **Jayant Misra**, Former Director General, Revenue Intelligence, India and Regional Consultant, UNODC.

Speakers:

1. Dr. **Kazi Maruful Islam**, Policy and Research Advisor, The Earth & Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.
2. Police Brigadier General **Kyaw Zaya**, Head of Division against Transnational Crime, Myanmar Police Force, Myanmar.

3. Mr. **Nishan Raj Gautam**, Under Secretary, MHA, Nepal.
4. Mr. **Anurag Sharma**, Associate Fellow, VIF, India.

Session 5- Harnessing Track 2 Dialogues for Stronger BIMSTEC Cooperation

By complementing formal government diplomacy, Track 2 engagements help bridge gaps between official and unofficial actors, thereby enhancing regional cooperation. These dialogues also facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise, which is crucial in addressing non-traditional security challenges that transcend national borders.

- Beyond the current conference agenda, what other issues should receive more attention?
- What role can think tanks play in strengthening BIMSTEC, especially people to people connectivity?
- How can the insights and recommendations generated be effectively communicated to government decision-makers?

Moderator: Dr. **Arvind Gupta**, Director, VIF

Speakers:

1. Dr. **Md. Mizanur Rahman**, Joint Secretary, Public Security Division, MHA, Bangladesh.
2. Mr. **Pasang Dorji**, Director General, Department of Law and Order, MHA, Bhutan.
3. Police Brigadier General **Kyaw Zaya**, Head of Division against Transnational Crime, Myanmar Police Force, Myanmar.
4. Mr. **Narayan Prasad Sapkota**, Joint Secretary, MHA, Nepal.
5. Brigadier **Pradeep Ratnayake**, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Defence and Administration), General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka.
6. Mr. **Ruchakorn Napapornpipat**, Deputy Secretary General, Office of National Security Council, Thailand.

Session 4- Cybersecurity Challenges and Emerging Technologies

BIMSTEC is focused on strengthening cybersecurity and addressing risks from emerging technologies. In 2025, BIMSTEC developed a Five-Year Action Plan for Cybersecurity Cooperation, aiming to enhance regional collaboration, combat cybercrime, protect critical infrastructure, and respond to cyber incidents. The BIMSTEC CERT-to-CERT framework and Cybercrime Cooperation Framework aim to streamline cooperation among law enforcement agencies. In the realm of emerging technologies, BIMSTEC promotes regional cooperation through the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility (TTF) in Colombo, which focuses on technology transfer, including in AI, IoT, blockchain, and digital financial systems, fostering innovation and secure technological growth.

- How can BIMSTEC establish cybersecurity and technological standards to ensure consistent protection against emerging threats across member states?
- How can BIMSTEC promote cybersecurity awareness and capacity-building among local stakeholders to combat digital financial fraud and cybercrime?
- How can BIMSTEC countries effectively address vulnerabilities in their digital economies that arise from the growing use of fintech and digital financial systems?
- How can BIMSTEC promote the development of indigenous AI capabilities within member states to ensure sustainable technological growth and security?

Moderator: Dr. **Gulshan Rai**, Distinguished Fellow, VIF.

Speakers:

1. Mr. **Lahpai Zau Goone**, Senior Advisory Member, MISIS, Myanmar.
2. Wing Commander **Charith Maheepala**, Assistant Military Assistant to Secretary Defence, MoD, Sri Lanka
3. Dr. **Wasin Punthong**, Lecturer, Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, Thailand.
4. Mr. **Sudhir Saxena**, Senior Fellow, VIF, India.

Concluding Session

Speakers:

1. Dr. **Arvind Gupta**, Director, VIF
2. Mr. **Indra Mani Pandey**, Secretary General, BIMSTEC

Summary of Recommendations

Session 1- Strengthening Maritime Security in the Bay of Bengal

- Adopt a BIMSTEC Maritime Security Charter to steer regional coordination.
- Establish a BIMSTEC Maritime Security Task Force to conduct joint exercises and patrols.
- Institute a BIMSTEC Training Ship SAGAR which would embark trainee officers for a month's voyage to other BIMSTEC countries and carry out joint patrolling in the Bay of Bengal.
- Institutionalise an intra-regional Joint Intelligence Sharing Platform. Enlarge regional MDA and establish UDA infrastructure.
- Form a BIMSTEC Group in IFC-IOR among the Liaison Officers of BIMSTEC countries for more frequent and detailed exchange of information and for coordination.
- Commission a Centre for Marine Environmental Monitoring for sharing data and responding to climate.
- Construct robust port infrastructure in climate-exposed coastal areas.
- Harmonize national maritime laws with UNCLOS III provisions.
- Prepare for annual combined Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations.
- Involves local communities in maritime security and environmental stewardship.
- Advance a regional blue economy through scientific partnership and sustainable policy environments.

Session 2- Economic Security and Connectivity in the Bay of Bengal Region

- Launch a BIMSTEC Regional Supply Chain Mechanism for critical sector mapping and contingency planning.
- Promote co-production and sourcing agreements in green tech, pharma, agri-tech, and electronics.
- Accelerate implementation of the Master Plan on Connectivity, especially for landlocked countries.

- Develop a BIMSTEC Energy Corridor, powered by Nepal's hydropower and Bhutan's green innovation/
- Create capacity-building programs for youth, SMEs, and digital entrepreneurs.
- Operationalize the BIMSTEC Maritime Transport Agreement for sea and port logistics.
- Invest in digital infrastructure, including smart ports and blockchain trade systems.
- Strengthen resilience frameworks for disaster, climate, and pandemic preparedness.
- Institutionalize a BIMSTEC Economic Security Dialogue.
- Support pilot zones and centers of excellence, like Bhutan's SAR and Nepal's energy projects.
- Creation of a Pilot project for cross-border payment systems for trading in digital and local currencies.
- BIMSTEC cooperation in critical minerals and rare earth elements sector could also be actively explored.

Session 3- Tackling Transnational Organized Crime Through Regional Cooperation

- Modernise border security in vulnerable and conflict-affected regions using advanced surveillance and AI technologies.
- Strengthen Anti-Money Laundering (AML) efforts and coordinate financial intelligence across BIMSTEC to disrupt crime financing.
- Establish the BIMSTEC Transnational Crime Coordination Centre (BTCCC) for real-time intelligence sharing, joint operations, and policy alignment.
- Harmonise legal frameworks across member states to close legal loopholes exploited by traffickers and syndicates.
- Enhance maritime security through joint patrols and capacity-building of enforcement agencies.
- Engage youth in crime prevention through sustained awareness campaigns, digital literacy programs, and startup incentives.
- Launch regional awareness campaigns involving governments, NGOs, and private sector actors to educate communities on organised crime. Create community surveillance systems to empower locals to report illicit activities.
- Develop border area programs involving local community that provide skill-based jobs and infrastructure to reduce criminal vulnerability.
- Establishment of a BIMSTEC youth working group and initiate fellowships to involve young leaders in anti-crime campaigns.
- Host a biennial regional youth summit to foster cross-border collaboration and trust.
- Promote public-private partnerships to leverage civil society and business expertise in tackling transnational crimes.

Session 4 - Cybersecurity Challenges and Emerging Technologies

- Reform BIMSTEC's institutional structure to enable faster, flexible decision-making and better coordination.
- Invest in indigenous digital innovation to reduce reliance on imported technologies.
- Strengthen regional cybersecurity through harmonized laws, standards, and joint action.
- Develop a BIMSTEC CERT-to-CERT Network for real-time cyber incident coordination.
- Implement the Cybercrime Cooperation Framework to streamline digital evidence handling and legal collaboration.
- Operationalize the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Colombo for innovation and tech sharing.
- Establish a regional cyber threat databank for intelligence sharing and preparedness.
- Conduct joint cyber defence exercises to build operational readiness.
- Create a BIMSTEC Cyber Defence Exercise Programme with multiple tiers of simulations.
- Set up a Cyber Coordination Portal and Cyber Resilience Index for communication and benchmarking.
- Harmonize cybersecurity and data protection laws across member states.
- Develop a Cyber Norms Charter through a new Interoperability Task Force.
- Use pilot projects and sandboxes to test and refine regional digital regulations.
- Establish a Cybersecurity Rapid Response Task Force for quick support during cyber incidents.
- Create a Technology Forecasting Group to anticipate and plan for emerging tech threats.
- Align with global norms like the Budapest Convention and GDPR where feasible.
- Champion a legally binding international convention on cyber governance.

Session 5 - Harnessing Track 2 Dialogues for Stronger BIMSTEC Cooperation

- Empower and Strengthen the BIMSTEC Secretariat by enhancing its institutional capacity, staffing, resources, and mandate to serve as a strategic facilitator for regional cooperation and decision implementation.
- Harmonizing of the participation of security chiefs at the top levels in BIMSTEC NSAs Dialogue [Currently, participation in BIMSTEC NSAs dialogue happens at various levels by different member countries. Important to keep uniformity of participation at top security chiefs' level].
- Develop Coordinated Cyber and Maritime Security Task Forces to jointly address emerging security threats through shared training, real-time intelligence exchange, and interoperable operational frameworks among Member States.
- Institutionalize BIMSTEC Youth Dialogues to engage young leaders from Member States in structured, regular discussions aimed at cultivating regional identity, leadership, and long-term cohesion.

- Establish Mechanisms to Strengthen Collaboration with Think Tanks, Academia, and Civil Society, including the creation of a BIMSTEC Centre for Strategic Studies, a Track 2 Think Tank Hub, and a BIMSTEC Knowledge and Policy Network for joint research, policy exchange, and capacity-building.
- Build and Maintain Sustained Political Will by securing high-level political commitment to regional cooperation that overcomes bureaucratic inertia, aligns national and regional priorities, and ensures implementation of agreed initiatives.
- Ensure Institutional Follow-Through and Implementation via National Security Channels, with recommendations from Track 1.5 dialogues to be reviewed by National Security Chiefs and operationalized through relevant Joint Working Groups.

Inaugural Session

The Inaugural Session began with Welcome Remarks by Dr Arvind Gupta, Director of the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), followed by the Inaugural Address delivered by Mr. Indra Mani Pandey, Secretary General of BIMSTEC, and Keynote Address where speech by Deputy National Security Advisor (Strategic Affairs), Mr Pavan Kapoor was read by Mr Gaurav Ahluwalia, Joint Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS).

Dr Arvind Gupta, Director, Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF)

Dr Arvind Gupta, Director of the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), formally welcomed delegates to the 4th BIMSTEC Track 1.5 Security Dialogue held on 6th – 7th May 2025, by thanking them for their participation, presence, and support. The Director (VIF) opened his remarks by condemning the recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir, on 22 April 2025, which resulted in the deaths of 25 Indian citizens and one Nepali national. He stated that the attackers had infiltrated from across the border and highlighted the persistent threat posed by terrorism and radicalisation across the region. He called for enhanced cooperation among BIMSTEC countries to address this shared security challenges.

During his speech, he highlighted the operationalisation of the BIMSTEC Charter and the adoption of the Bangkok Vision 2030 at the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit in April 2025 as significant milestones. These documents provide a strategic direction for regional integration, connectivity, and cooperation. However, he emphasised that translating these goals into action requires sustained political commitment and institutional capacity. The BIMSTEC region faces common development and security challenges, like economic vulnerabilities, food and water insecurity, climate change, and the rising frequency of extreme weather events. He welcomed the establishment of a new BIMSTEC mechanism for Home Ministers' meetings to address terrorism, trafficking, and organised crime. Additionally, Dr Gupta encouraged greater regional collaboration in building resilience against environmental and security threats.

The Director VIF also discussed the dual nature of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and synthetic biology. While these presents significant opportunities for development, they also pose risks—particularly in labour markets, data privacy, and national security. Therefore, there is a need for BIMSTEC countries to shape their technological narratives rather than adopt external models and call for collective approaches to digital governance.

Reaffirming India's commitment to BIMSTEC, he outlined key proposals made by Prime Minister Modi at the recent summit which include establishing a BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce, launching feasibility studies on local currency trade and digital public infrastructure, and creating centres of excellence for disaster management, traditional medicine, agriculture, and space cooperation. India has also announced initiatives such as the BODHI scholarship, a young leaders' summit, a hackathon, and plans to host the inaugural BIMSTEC Games in 2027.

Despite progress, BIMSTEC still has significant ground to cover, including finalising the Free Trade Agreement and enhancing regional infrastructure, enhancing actions on cybersecurity, energy transition, and counterterrorism.

In concluding remarks, the Director VIF highlighted the role of think tanks in shaping policy, promoting dialogue, and fostering scholarly collaboration. Notably, VIF organized two editions of the BIMSTEC Think Tanks Dialogue on Regional Security in 2018 and 2019. He reaffirmed VIF's continued support for regional integration and scholarly engagement across the BIMSTEC region.

Mr Indra Mani Pandey, Secretary General, BIMSTEC

At the 4th Edition of the Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue, Secretary General Mr. Indra Mani Pandey started his inaugural address by highlighting the growing importance of regional security cooperation within the Bay of Bengal region. He commended the Government of India and the Vivekananda International Foundation for hosting the Dialogue, which he described as timely and necessary. The Secretary General underscored BIMSTEC's increasing relevance as a regional platform that brings together five South Asian and two Southeast Asian countries, serving as a unique bridge between the two regions. He emphasised that since its inception in 1997, BIMSTEC has focused on technical and economic cooperation, deliberately steering clear of contentious political issues to maintain a functional and inclusive approach to regional development and security.

He noted the progress BIMSTEC has made in recent years, particularly since the establishment of the Secretariat in Dhaka in 2014. The adoption of the BIMSTEC Charter, sectoral action plans, conventions, and formal partnerships was cited as evidence of institutional maturity. The Secretary General also highlighted the significant achievements of the 6th BIMSTEC Summit, including the adoption of the

BIMSTEC Rules of Procedure, the BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030, and key agreements such as the Maritime Transport Cooperation Agreement and MoUs with UNODC and IORA.

Regarding regional security, Mr. Pandey reiterated BIMSTEC's foundational belief that the Bay of Bengal is a shared security space, and that cooperative security is the most effective means of addressing transnational challenges. He outlined the organisation's achievements in areas such as counterterrorism, cybersecurity, combating human and drug trafficking, and addressing illicit financial flows. He further noted ongoing efforts to finalise legal instruments on mutual legal assistance, extradition, transfer of sentenced persons, and anti-trafficking. The Secretary General highlighted new and emerging threats such as biosecurity risks, cybercrime (particularly financial fraud), and the subversion of undersea infrastructure. He emphasised the importance of regional cooperation in addressing these threats and called for greater collaboration in areas such as maritime domain awareness, disaster response, and space-based security initiatives.

Additionally, Mr. Pandey made two key recommendations. First, he proposed that the Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue be held on a more regular basis—annually or at least once every two years—to ensure sustained engagement on security issues. Second, he recommended a review of the recommendations from previous editions of the Dialogue, many of which remain relevant. He requested the Vivekananda International Foundation to lead the follow-up process and assess their implementation. Finally, the Secretary General emphasised the valuable role of think tanks in shaping regional security strategies. He encouraged the inclusion of a wider range of research institutions in future dialogues to enrich discussions with diverse perspectives. In conclusion, he urged all participants to engage constructively and work towards actionable outcomes that strengthen BIMSTEC's regional security framework.

Mr. Pavan Kapoor, Deputy National Security Adviser (Strategic Affairs), NSCS

The Keynote Address speech by Deputy National Security Advisor (Strategic Affairs), Mr Pavan Kapoor was read by Mr Gaurav Ahluwalia, Joint Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS). In the keynote address, the speaker emphasised the growing relevance of BIMSTEC as a platform for regional cooperation in a changing global landscape. He highlighted the role of the Vivekananda International Foundation in providing a valuable space for strategic discourse, in sustaining momentum under the BIMSTEC framework. The speaker underlined that BIMSTEC has emerged as a vital bridge between South and Southeast Asia, with growing potential to strengthen regional security, connectivity, and economic integration. He noted that since the adoption of the BIMSTEC Charter, efforts have been directed at laying a strong institutional foundation. However, he also acknowledged the vast untapped potential for further cooperation.

Focusing on the security pillar, the speaker highlighted the importance of the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs (NSC) track. Conceived during the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat in Goa in 2016, this track has played a crucial role in addressing non-traditional and emerging security threats. He observed that four NSC meetings have been held so far, reflecting a growing commitment to this agenda. The speaker further pointed out that expert groups formed under this track—on maritime security, cybersecurity, Himalayan science, and space cooperation—are instrumental in shaping the operational aspects of policy. The speaker stressed the importance of Track 1.5 Dialogues in enabling frank and creative exchanges of ideas. He recommended leveraging these dialogues to explore new areas of cooperation and bridge gaps between political intent and practical implementation.

Further, the speaker highlighted that economic development and security are deeply interconnected. He recommended that BIMSTEC prioritise regional infrastructure and supply chain connectivity. He pointed to the first BIMSTEC Ports Conclave held in 2019, which explored port-led development and security collaboration, and he encouraged renewed focus on the delayed second conclave, which is scheduled for later this year. On cybersecurity, the speaker highlighted the adoption of a Five-Year Action Plan, focused on reducing vulnerabilities, strengthening resilience, and promoting ICT-led growth. He noted that India is ready to share its experience with Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), including its Unified Payments Interface (UPI), to enhance digital connectivity in the region.

The speaker also emphasised the ecological and security interdependence between the Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal. In this regard, he highlighted the proposed BIMSTEC Himalayan Science Council and its scheduled meeting in July this year. He also pointed to India's initiative to establish a BIMSTEC Ground Station and develop nanosatellites as significant steps in expanding space cooperation, with the first expert group meeting expected later this year. In concluding, the speaker recommended that member states move from intent to action by actively implementing agreements and reinforcing institutional mechanisms. He called for greater ambition in shaping BIMSTEC's future and expressed confidence that the Dialogue would generate meaningful and actionable outcomes.

Session 1- Strengthening Maritime Security in the Bay of Bengal

The session was moderated by Vice Admiral Sanjay Mahindru (Retd), Former Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, Indian Navy. The panel of speakers included Mr. Htet Phyo Aung, Deputy Director at the Ministry of Transport and Communications, Myanmar; Commander Bhanu Abeygunawardhana, Military Research Officer at the Institute of National Security Studies of Sri Lanka under the Ministry of Defence; Captain Panuphun Rakkeo, Management Director at the Thailand-MECC Operations Centre, Thailand; and Captain Anurag Bisen (Retd), Senior Fellow at the Vivekananda International Foundation, India. Some of the salient points discussed were:

Strategic and Economic Significance of the Bay of Bengal

The Bay of Bengal receives over 80% of global oil trade and almost half of all the container traffic. It also has strategic regional ports, located in Chittagong (Bangladesh), Colombo (Sri Lanka), Chennai (India), Ranong (Thailand) and Yangon (Myanmar). These major ports serve as transshipment and logistical hubs. The Bay of Bengal has an abundance of hydrocarbons, fish, and biodiversity with mangrove forests like the Sundarbans, highlighting its ecological and economic importance.

Maritime Security in Bay of Bengal is a critical determinant of regional economic stability, ecological sustainability, and geopolitical balance. Located between South and Southeast Asia, the bay covers an area of more than 2.5 million square kilometres and directly influences almost one-quarter of the world's population. It is a critical maritime bridge and a strategic corridor for international trade and the global energy flow. There are immense economic opportunities that require political stability, which is the primary responsibility of the littoral states around the bay. It is important to stress the need for capacity building and cooperation, particularly in addressing new maritime issues effectively and collectively.

On the security front, India's shift from the Sagar to Mahasagar doctrine, along with China's Maritime Silk Road initiative, highlights the Bay of Bengal's growing importance in global naval diplomacy and

power projection. As the global flow of trade shifts from West to East, geopolitical interest in the region is increasing, with multiple states engaged in strategic competition.

Traditional Threats in Bay of Bengal

In recent times, state actors, including littorals around the Bay of Bengal and elsewhere, have intensely concentrated on protecting maritime sovereignty. Maritime rivalry is now an increasing concern, particularly as protecting the sea lines of communication (SLOC) is directly linked to a nation's economic viability and national security. The evolving strategic calculus of the Indian Ocean has also increased submarine deployments and bilateral port access agreements, creating new security challenges among the Bay of Bengal littorals.

Non-Traditional Threats in Bay of Bengal

Non-state threats have grown more transnational and complex. IUU fishing erodes resources and disrespects sustainable practices. While the bay is home to one-third of the world's fishermen, it produces only 7% of global catch quantities, reflecting a systemic dependence on subsistence-level activity and prevalent economic inefficiencies. The area suffers from uneven environmental vulnerability. Deaths due to cyclones account for 80% of cyclone-related deaths worldwide, while the bay comprises just 0.6% of the global ocean surface area.

Further, rising sea levels, pollution, and the frequency of natural calamities constitute a significant risk to infrastructure and populations living around coastal areas. Simultaneously, given the large area covered by the Bay of Bengal, smugglers can engage in narcotics, human trafficking, and arms smuggling, which overburdens regional law enforcement agencies.

National Maritime Security Strategies

The following section highlights the difference approaches taken by the littoral members of BIMSTEC. While cooperation in various fields are ongoing, different members face their unique challenges in administering their laws and protecting their territorial interests.

- **India's Maritime Security Strategy**

India prioritises maritime security in the three waterbodies surrounding the country and actively seeks to enhance maritime domain awareness. This endeavour is further enhanced through bilateral and multilateral naval engagements such as the Navy's multinational maritime exercise MALABAR, which aims to bolster interoperability and readiness. The Indian Navy maintains operational readiness through mission-based

deployments while investing in coastal surveillance systems. Another significant initiative is SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region). It has since evolved into MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across the Regions). India has also developed strategic infrastructure for power projection and monitoring critical sea lanes, such as in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. India has also launched the IFC-IOR (Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region) to enhance maritime situational awareness through data sharing. Another initiative in the IOR region is the trilateral maritime security dialogue between India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives to address maritime threats and collaborate on security issues jointly.

- **Sri Lanka's Maritime Security Strategy**

The country focuses on safeguarding its maritime interests by enhancing its naval capabilities through joint maritime patrols and other operations. As part of the drive to promote cooperation, the Sri Lankan government has called for joint hydrographic surveys and data sharing to buttress the country's limited capacity in this area. Enhancing maritime domain awareness (MDA) by promoting real-time satellite image sharing, monitoring maritime activities, and dark vessel surveillance. The Sri Lankan Navy pursues joint training, collaborative exercises, and resource sharing to build maritime security capability and law enforcement. The government is also actively encouraging frequent engagements between law enforcement agencies to impose strict rules, particularly on fisheries and arms smuggling.

Joint scientific research, collaborative responses to oil spills and marine pollution, and monitoring other ways to combat the non-traditional challenges in the Bay of Bengal. The Sri Lankan authorities have also recommended the creation of a Marine Spatial Data Infrastructure (MSDI) for all BIMSTEC nations. Similarly, they have also sought to strengthen search and rescue operations, early cyclone warning systems, Humanitarian Assistance, and Disaster Relief (HADR).

- **Thailand's Maritime Security Strategy**

Thailand's Maritime Enforcement Command Centre (THAI-MECC) was formed in 2019. Its primary function is integrating the Royal Thai Navy, Marine Police, Customs Department, Department of Fisheries, and other agencies into a common operational framework. This initiative is meant to reduce miscommunication, enhance real-time decision-making, and enhance Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).

The agency is present in three of Thailand's maritime areas: the upper and lower Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea. Between January 2024 and March 2025, Thai authorities recorded the highest number of maritime emergencies, including capsized boats, illegal fishing, and maritime pollution around the

Andaman Sea. Other incidents included human, narcotics, and arms smuggling. The data reveals a greater need for joint maritime surveillance, particularly with other littorals in the Bay of Bengal.

- **Myanmar's Maritime Enforcement Strategy**

Myanmar's Department of Marine Administration (DMA) regulates maritime law enforcement and global compliance with UNCLOS, SOLAS, and the ISPS Code. It deploys Automated Identification Systems (AIS), radar installations, and coastal community reporting to monitor activity and deter illicit activities. Myanmar has legislated pirate crime penalties and established ship monitoring systems on its registered fishing vessels. Myanmar's naval and police task forces frequently patrol the Rakhine Coast and other vulnerable areas. Only Myanmar received maritime distress calls during 2024, including sinking rescue operations and refugee assistance, proving the country's operational commitment to maritime protection.

Institutional Challenges and Governance Gaps

Even with the availability of subregional forums like BIMSTEC and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), maritime cooperation is still limited owing to institutional inertia and non-enforcement mechanisms. For example, the 2018 BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement has not been fully implemented, and bureaucratic and logistical challenges have held it back.

India's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) is a potential model for integrating and sharing real-time maritime information among BIMSTEC members. However, technological mismatches and incompatible communication platforms continue to hinder seamless cooperation.

Aligning Legal Frameworks and Intelligence Exchange

Inconsistencies in each nation's legal system impede coordinated naval operations. The BIMSTEC states cannot fully prosecute transnational offences because of incompatible justice systems and delays in processing offenders. The member states must establish intelligence-sharing mechanisms and establish a uniform adjudication process. Further, promoting a BIMSTEC joint information-sharing centre could streamline intelligence sharing and facilitate coordinated action. Ongoing legal discussions and officer changes would assist in aligning each nation's laws with UNCLOS III provisions and improve maritime interdiction and prosecution processes.

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and Underwater Surveillance

Enhanced maritime domain awareness (MDA) remains at the forefront of guaranteeing the bay. The local players have requested that MDA be extended to cover Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) for submarine tracking, defence of undersea facilities, and subsurface threat detection.

Stakeholders recommended deploying a Bay of Bengal regional patrol ship operated by mixed BIMSTEC crews to facilitate mutual surveillance and increase operational trust. Expanding surveillance into underwater spaces will address concerns about extra-regional submarine presence and energy and communications line threats.

Environmental Protection and Climate Resilience

Sea-level rise, oil spills, and reckless maritime activity cause environmental degradation across the bay. These threats jeopardise ecologically vulnerable places like the Sundarbans and accelerate biodiversity loss. Regional stakeholders must adopt an integrated marine environmental management strategy.

During the BIMSTEC Security Dialogue, orators proposed undertaking joint environmental impact assessments, carrying out cooperative hydrographic surveys, and exchanging satellite-based climate data. A Regional Centre for Marine Environmental Monitoring may be responsible for scientific research, disaster forecasting, and resilience planning.

Capacity Building and the Blue Economy

Weaker littoral nations suffer from persistent capacity deficits in hydrography, port security, and maritime law enforcement. BIMSTEC must operate as a mechanism for mutual assistance, capacity development, and technology transfer. Regional exercises and training exchanges will improve interoperability and joint response to crises.

Concurrently, nations must invest in establishing a sustainable blue economy through the sustainable management of fisheries, promoting a greener maritime industry, and engaging coastal communities in decision-making. Long-term planning and collaborative governance are necessary to ensure fair development and harmony with the environment.

Recommendations

- Adopt a BIMSTEC Maritime Security Charter to steer regional coordination.
- Establish a BIMSTEC Maritime Security Task Force to conduct joint exercises and patrols.
- Institute a BIMSTEC Training Ship SAGAR which would embark trainee officers for a month's voyage to other BIMSTEC countries and carry out joint patrolling in the Bay of Bengal.
- Institutionalise an intra-regional Joint Intelligence Sharing Platform. Enlarge regional MDA and establish UDA infrastructure.
- Form a BIMSTEC Group in IFC-IOR among the Liaison Officers of BIMSTEC countries for more frequent and detailed exchange of information and for coordination.

- Commission a Centre for Marine Environmental Monitoring for sharing data and responding to climate.
- Construct robust port infrastructure in climate-exposed coastal areas.
- Harmonize national maritime laws with UNCLOS III provisions.
- Prepare for annual combined Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations.
- Involves local communities in maritime security and environmental stewardship.
- Advance a regional blue economy through scientific partnership and sustainable policy environments.

Session 2- Economic Security and Connectivity in the Bay of Bengal Region

The session was moderated by Mr. Lekhan Thakkar, Joint Secretary at the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS). The panel of speakers included Mr. Md. Rafid Abrar Miah, Research Officer at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), Bangladesh; Mr. Dasho Karma Tshiteem, Governing Board Member of the Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS), Bhutan; Mr. Pharshu Ram Bhattarai, Section Officer at the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Nepal; and Dr. Constantino Xavier, Senior Fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP), India. Some of the salient points discussed were:

Economic Security: The Cornerstone of Regional Stability and Development

In an era where economic security is fundamentally intertwined with national and regional security, BIMSTEC occupies a uniquely important strategic position. The Bay of Bengal region, encompassing seven member states—Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand—is home to over 1.7 billion people, nearly a quarter of the world’s population, and collectively commands a GDP exceeding \$5.2 trillion. Despite this immense demographic and economic potential, intra-regional trade remains strikingly low at around 6 to 7 percent, far below the levels seen in other regional groupings such as ASEAN.

This limited economic integration points to the presence of substantial barriers and inefficiencies, ranging from inadequate transport and energy infrastructure to non-tariff barriers and regulatory fragmentation. Addressing these challenges is essential for transforming BIMSTEC from a loosely connected association into a robust economic community. Enhancing connectivity—physical, digital, and energy—is crucial not only for accelerating trade flows but also for boosting investment and creating jobs that contribute to inclusive growth and shared prosperity.

India's strategic policies, such as the "Neighbourhood First" approach and "Act East" policy, resonate deeply with BIMSTEC's goals. These policies emphasize strengthening ties with neighbours through infrastructure investments, trade facilitation, and people-to-people linkages. This alignment offers a platform for coordinated regional efforts to build resilient, secure supply chains and seamless connectivity corridors, which in turn can buffer the region against external shocks and geopolitical uncertainties.

BIMSTEC's Strategic Transformation: Evolving from Cooperation to Security Architecture

BIMSTEC is at a crossroads. Since its inception as a forum for technical and developmental cooperation, the organisation is now gradually expanding its mandate to encompass strategic and security dimensions. This evolution is driven by the increasingly complex security environment in the Indo-Pacific, characterized by maritime disputes, non-traditional security threats, and geopolitical competition.

Notable milestones, such as the first National Security Chiefs' meeting in 2017 and the adoption of the Bangkok Vision, reflect BIMSTEC's intent to deepen cooperation beyond economic and technical matters. The regional disruptions witnessed in recent years—Sri Lanka's economic crisis and political instability, Myanmar's military takeover and ensuing conflict, rising cross-border migration, climate change impacts, and increasing cyber vulnerabilities—have exposed the fragility of the region's security environment.

In this context, BIMSTEC's potential to develop into a "Common Security Space" that integrates economic resilience with collective security cooperation is both timely and necessary. This would entail a paradigm shift from ad hoc responses to systemic, coordinated mechanisms designed to address multi-dimensional risks while upholding principles of sovereignty, inclusivity, and the rule of law.

Principles Guiding BIMSTEC's Future: Integration, Resilience, and Institutional Depth

Three guiding principles must underpin BIMSTEC's future trajectory. First, the artificial divide between economic development and security must be eliminated. Economic connectivity and trade security are inseparable from broader notions of national and regional security, particularly in a globalized world where supply chains and infrastructure networks can become targets or vulnerabilities in geopolitical contests.

Second, BIMSTEC must evolve from being primarily a dialogue platform to becoming a coherent security architecture that supports not only political consultations but also practical, enforceable mechanisms for cooperation across domains including counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and disaster management.

Third, the intensity and frequency of systemic shocks—whether pandemics, climate disasters, political instability, or economic disruptions—are increasing. Resilience must therefore be embedded not just in

national policies but also within the institutional architecture of BIMSTEC, enabling rapid adaptation, resource sharing, and mutual support.

Strategic Priorities: Institutional Capacity and Integrated Cooperation

BIMSTEC's ability to transform depends on concrete strategic priorities that bridge the gap between lofty visions and ground realities. Strengthening institutional capacity is paramount. This involves building professional, well-resourced secretariats and working groups with clear mandates, accountability mechanisms, and technical expertise.

Furthermore, integrating economic and security cooperation is vital to create a seamless approach to regional challenges. This includes sharing intelligence on emerging threats, coordinating supply chain risk assessments, harmonizing customs and regulatory standards, and fostering joint training and capacity-building initiatives.

By establishing common platforms to predict, prevent, and manage disruptions—whether natural disasters or geopolitical crises—BIMSTEC can develop a culture of proactive cooperation that moves beyond reactive, episodic interventions.

Supply Chain Resilience: From Exposure to Strategic Advantage

The COVID-19 pandemic starkly exposed the vulnerabilities of global and regional supply chains, underscoring the need for diversification, transparency, and agility. BIMSTEC must leverage this moment to create a regional supply chain resilience framework that identifies critical sectors—pharmaceuticals, agricultural technology, electronics, and emerging green technologies—and develops simulation tools to model potential disruptions.

Such a framework should prioritize diversification strategies like the “supply-plus-one” approach, which encourages countries to develop alternate sourcing alongside existing suppliers to mitigate risks. Investments in logistics infrastructure—ports, cold chains, transport corridors—and adoption of advanced technologies such as blockchain for traceability, AI for predictive analytics, and IoT for real-time monitoring will enhance transparency and responsiveness.

Cross-border industrial cooperation, especially involving SMEs, can act as a catalyst for deeper regional economic integration and innovation, fostering an ecosystem of shared value creation and resilience.

Closing the Connectivity Gap: Accelerating Trade and People-to-People Links

Despite the ambitious BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity, comprising 260 projects, implementation remains sluggish. The region's intra-trade volume is a mere fraction of ASEAN's,

reflecting persistent barriers such as inadequate physical infrastructure, cumbersome customs procedures, lack of harmonized standards, and limited digital integration.

To unlock this potential, BIMSTEC must fast-track projects that improve border crossings, upgrade ports and road networks, and enhance maritime linkages. Operationalizing agreements like the BIMSTEC Maritime Transport Cooperation Agreement will facilitate smoother cargo and passenger movement.

Digital connectivity is equally crucial. Building robust broadband infrastructure, promoting e-commerce, harmonizing digital standards, and enhancing cybersecurity frameworks will enable smoother trade flows and deepen socio-economic linkages, including tourism, cultural exchanges, and educational partnerships.

Special attention is needed for landlocked members like Bhutan and Nepal, whose connectivity challenges require innovative solutions such as transit agreements, multimodal transport corridors, and energy grid interconnections.

Bhutan and Nepal: Catalysts for Innovation and Energy Integration

Bhutan and Nepal stand poised to play transformative roles within BIMSTEC's regional framework. Bhutan's initiative to establish a Special Administrative Region near Assam—anchored in principles of sustainability, wellness, and Buddhist cultural values—envisioning creating a regional innovation and resilience hub.

The proposed Gelephu Mindfulness City draws inspiration from global models such as Singapore and Dubai but uniquely integrates Bhutan's identity, focusing on green technologies, spiritual tourism, and knowledge economy sectors. This initiative offers a compelling model of development that balances modernization with cultural preservation.

Nepal, with its vast untapped hydropower potential estimated at 42,000 MW, is strategically positioned to become an energy powerhouse for the region. India's commitment to importing 10,000 MW, along with Bangladesh's recent power purchase agreements, reflect growing regional interdependence in energy security.

For these opportunities to materialize, coordinated regional energy grids, cross-border transmission lines, and regulatory frameworks must be rapidly developed, ensuring sustainable, affordable, and reliable energy flows that underpin industrial and economic growth.

Structural Challenges: Overcoming Political and Institutional Bottlenecks

BIMSTEC's path forward is constrained by persistent structural challenges. Political will and continuity are often disrupted by changing governments, shifting national priorities, and competing regional initiatives.

This leads to delays in project implementation, uneven resource allocation, and gaps in policy coherence.

Trust deficits among members, low harmonization of standards, and limited engagement of private sector and civil society actors further constrain the organisation's effectiveness. There is also an acute need for capacity building in areas such as digital skills, youth employment, and entrepreneurial development.

Addressing these challenges requires an institutional culture of transparency, accountability, and results-oriented collaboration. Sustained investments in institutional strengthening, professionalisation of the secretariat, and empowerment of working groups with clear mandates are essential.

BIMSTEC at a Strategic Inflection Point: Seizing Opportunities Amid Disruption

The geopolitical shifts and economic disruptions of recent years—including great power rivalries, pandemic aftermaths, and climate crises—pose risks but also opportunities for BIMSTEC. The organisation must now transition from a project-centric entity to a strategically oriented regional architecture with a long-term vision.

Leveraging the leadership and capabilities of key members such as India and Thailand, while promoting inclusive participation from smaller states, can help BIMSTEC focus on a few high-impact priority sectors and initiatives that deliver tangible benefits.

Embedding economic security and institutional resilience into BIMSTEC's core logic will be key to transforming it into a durable and influential regional framework that can withstand external shocks and advance member states' shared interests.

Recommendations

- Launch a BIMSTEC Regional Supply Chain Mechanism for critical sector mapping and contingency planning
- Promote co-production and sourcing agreements in green tech, pharma, agri-tech, and electronics
- Accelerate implementation of the Master Plan on Connectivity, especially for landlocked countries
- Develop a BIMSTEC Energy Corridor, powered by Nepal's hydropower and Bhutan's green innovation
- Create capacity-building programs for youth, SMEs, and digital entrepreneurs
- Operationalize the BIMSTEC Maritime Transport Agreement for sea and port logistics
- Invest in digital infrastructure, including smart ports and blockchain trade systems
- Strengthen resilience frameworks for disaster, climate, and pandemic preparedness

- Institutionalize a BIMSTEC Economic Security Dialogue
- Support pilot zones and centers of excellence, like Bhutan's SAR and Nepal's energy projects
- Creation of a Pilot project for cross-border payment systems for trading in digital and local currencies.
- BIMSTEC cooperation in critical minerals and rare earth elements sector could also be actively explored.

Session 3- Tackling Transnational Organized Crime Through Regional Cooperation

The session was moderated by Mr. Jayant Misra, Former Director General of Revenue Intelligence, India, and Regional Consultant for UNODC. The panel of speakers included Dr. Kazi Maruful Islam, Policy and Research Advisor at The Earth and Professor in the Department of Development Studies at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh; Police Brigadier General Kyaw Zaya, Head of the Division against Transnational Crime with the Myanmar Police Force; Mr. Nishan Raj Gautam, Under Secretary at the Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal; and Mr. Anurag Sharma, Associate Fellow at the Vivekananda International Foundation, India. Some of the salient points discussed were:

Strengthening BIMSTEC's Collective Response to Transnational Organised Crime

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) has begun deepening its institutional engagement with the evolving threat of transnational organised crime (TOC), including narcotics trafficking, cybercrime, money laundering, and human trafficking. With the region's strategic location—connecting South and Southeast Asia and lying adjacent to major drug-producing areas like the Golden Triangle—BIMSTEC member states face a growing convergence of criminal and terrorist networks that transcend national borders.

The group's legal and institutional framework for addressing TOC is anchored in the 2009 BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organised Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking, which entered into force in 2021. Through this, the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (JWG-CTTC) has held ten meetings, supported by sub-groups coordinated by member states. India has taken the lead on legal and law enforcement cooperation, counter-radicalisation, and anti-terror coordination.

Evolving Drug Trafficking Patterns and Regional Vulnerabilities

Recent trends point to a marked shift in regional narcotics dynamics—from plant-based drugs to synthetic and designer substances. The increasing flow of methamphetamine, yaba, Ecstasy, Captagon, and hydroponic cannabis reflects both innovation in illicit production and growing demand. Countries like Bangladesh are witnessing seizures of party drugs rarely seen before, while new flows of cocaine and synthetic opioids are making their way into South Asia via maritime, postal and air routes.

The UNODC has raised alarms over surging methamphetamine seizures in Southeast Asia, pointing to industrial-scale production operations. Of particular concern is the trafficking of pharmaceutical precursors—chemicals necessary for drug synthesis—which are often legally manufactured but illegally diverted. Bangladesh, India, and Nepal are becoming both, transit and destination countries in this expanding web.

Organised crime syndicates are capitalising on porous land borders, limited maritime surveillance, and gaps in legal enforcement across jurisdictions. Many of these networks are also intertwined with terror financing and exploit state fragility, local corruption, and technological gaps.

Institutional Milestones and Strategic Shifts

The 4th BIMSTEC Security Chiefs' Meeting, held in Myanmar in July 2024, and the 10th JWG-CTTC meeting in New Delhi in January 2023, were landmark platforms in the regional discourse. These meetings advanced discussions on cross-border intelligence sharing, control of precursor chemicals, and the use of forensic science in anti-drug efforts.

India's proposal at the 2025 BIMSTEC Leaders' Summit to establish a dedicated Working Group on Drug Trafficking marks a strategic pivot toward more structured and sustained coordination. India and Bangladesh have already launched a pilot blockchain-based tracing project to monitor pharmaceutical precursors—a potential best practice that could be subsequently scaled across the region.

Myanmar's commitment to improving its national legal framework to better align with regional anti-crime norms, and to establish financial intelligence units for monitoring crypto-linked criminal flows, was welcomed as a critical and timely move.

Targeting the Financial Lifeblood of Organised Crime

A recurring theme in the discussion was the urgent need to focus on the financial underpinnings of TOC. Syndicates today are highly adaptable, operating through legitimate-looking fronts such as hotels, import-

export companies, cryptocurrency platforms, and online gaming hubs. They increasingly use anonymous digital payment systems—including cryptocurrencies, NFTs, and gaming tokens—for laundering profits and moving funds across borders undetected.

To counter this, the session advocated stronger alignment with FATF standards and enhanced capacity building of the Law Enforcement Agencies across BIMSTEC members, coordinated anti-money laundering (AML) frameworks, and the adoption of AI-driven tracking tools for financial intelligence. The establishment of a BIMSTEC Transnational Crime Coordination Centre (BTCCC) was proposed to serve as a regional nerve centre for real-time information sharing, policy coordination, and joint operations.

Maritime Dimensions and Border Management

Given the criticality of maritime trade and the increasing use of sea routes for drug smuggling, the discussion highlighted the need for enhanced coastal and maritime security cooperation. Member states were urged to conduct joint patrols, establish shared coastal monitoring mechanisms, and boost surveillance capacity through shared satellite imagery and enhanced automated vessel tracking.

In landlocked and border-sensitive countries such as Nepal and Bhutan, the porousness of national frontiers with India and China was flagged as a serious vulnerability. Nepal, in particular, is becoming an increasingly vulnerable transit corridor for drugs and human trafficking, particularly involving women and children. These networks often work in tandem with online digital platforms that facilitate trafficking through deceptive job advertisements and social media recruitment.

Human Trafficking, Migration, and Organised Syndicates

Human trafficking remains deeply entrenched in the region's criminal ecosystem, often underpinned by poverty, conflict, gender-based violence, and the absence of employment opportunities. From India to Myanmar and Nepal to Thailand, syndicates exploit weak enforcement, corruption, and lack of victim rehabilitation infrastructure. Bhutan has also occasionally raised concerns about the rising trends in this segment of ToC.

The session cited successful joint rescue operations between Thailand and Myanmar—especially the high-profile crackdown on scam centres in Myanmar in 2024—as models for future cooperation. Over 7,700 trafficked individuals, including citizens of India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, were rescued and repatriated through coordinated bilateral intelligence operations. This operation exemplified what joint action backed by political will and technical coordination can achieve.

Youth at the Frontlines: Prevention, Not Just Policing

A standout concern raised during the session was the falling age of first-time drug use in South Asia, now reported to be as low as 12 years. There was consensus that TOC cannot be addressed through punitive

approaches alone—it must also be fought on social and developmental fronts, with strong awareness-building efforts, particularly by engaging the youth.

India's *Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan* (Drug-Free India Campaign), now active in all 800+ districts, was held up as a good example. Its focus on school outreach, mentor training, and community monitoring has created a replicable model for other BIMSTEC countries. The role of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) in launching child-centric awareness programs was also recognized and lauded.

At the global level, two United Nations-led programs were spotlighted: the Doha Declaration's "Youth Crime Prevention through Sports" and the Education for Justice (E4J) initiative. These have reached over 1.5 million youth, including those in South Asia, equipping them to resist criminal recruitment and promote civic values.

Building on these, the session proposed that BIMSTEC consider launching a Regional Youth Fellowship on Crime Prevention, host a biennial Youth Forum, and establish digital literacy missions to equip young citizens with the skills to detect and resist online scams, drug sales, and trafficking attempts.

Legal Harmonisation and Institutional Mechanisms

One of the biggest roadblocks in combatting TOC in BIMSTEC remains the lack of harmonised legal standards across countries. Traffickers often exploit gaps and contradictions in national laws—for instance, when certain substances or crypto practices are legal in one jurisdiction but criminalised in another.

The session advocated for greater legal alignment, mutual legal assistance treaties (MLATs), and standardised procedures for extradition, asset recovery, and admissibility of electronic evidence. A regional legal reference database and BIMSTEC-wide training programs for prosecutors and judges were recommended.

Creating a standing Regional Joint Task Force under the Security Cooperation pillar was also proposed to monitor the implementation of conventions and facilitate structured follow-up of recommendations from ministerial and working group meetings.

Need for a Multi-Layered and Future-Ready Strategy

The discussions at the session made clear that transnational organised crime in the BIMSTEC region is not just a law-and-order problem but a strategic challenge with much wider financial, social, and geopolitical consequences. Organised crime threatens democratic institutions, undermines legal economies, destabilises border regions, and endangers vulnerable populations.

BIMSTEC's path forward must balance enforcement with prevention, regional coordination with national action, and hard tools with soft solutions. Institutions must be upgraded, information must flow in real time, and capacities—from cyber forensics to financial intelligence—must be jointly built. Youth engagement, tech-enabled monitoring, and trust-based cooperation will be the foundation of any lasting success.

Recommendations

- Modernise border security in vulnerable and conflict-affected regions using advanced surveillance and AI technologies.
- Strengthen Anti-Money Laundering (AML) efforts and coordinate financial intelligence across BIMSTEC to disrupt crime financing.
- Establish the BIMSTEC Transnational Crime Coordination Centre (BTCCC) for real-time intelligence sharing, joint operations, and policy alignment.
- Harmonise legal frameworks across member states to close legal loopholes exploited by traffickers and syndicates.
- Enhance maritime security through joint patrols and capacity-building of enforcement agencies.
- Engage youth in crime prevention through sustained awareness campaigns, digital literacy programs, and startup incentives.
- Launch regional awareness campaigns involving governments, NGOs, and private sector actors to educate communities on organised crime. Create community surveillance systems to empower locals to report illicit activities.
- Develop border area programs involving local community that provide skill-based jobs and infrastructure to reduce criminal vulnerability.
- Establishment of a BIMSTEC youth working group and initiate fellowships to involve young leaders in anti-crime campaigns.
- Host a biennial regional youth summit to foster cross-border collaboration and trust.
- Promote public-private partnerships to leverage civil society and business expertise in tackling transnational crimes.

Session IV: Cybersecurity Challenges and Emerging Technologies

The session was moderated by Dr. Gulshan Rai, Distinguished Fellow at the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF). The panel of speakers comprised Mr. Lahpai Zau Goone, Senior Advisory Member at MISIS, Myanmar; Wing Commander Charith Maheepala, Assistant Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defence, Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka; Dr. Wasin Punthong, Lecturer in the Faculty of Political Science at Thammasat University, Thailand; and Mr. Sudhir Saxena, Senior Fellow at VIF, India. Some of the salient points discussed were:

A Region Poised for Digital and Economic Leadership

The BIMSTEC region is rapidly asserting itself as a critical digital and economic hub. Hosting nearly 24% of the world's population, it possesses a demographic dividend that drives expansive growth across sectors. In 2024, the combined GDP of BIMSTEC nations surged to US \$5.2 trillion, with the digital economy contributing a substantial 17%. This marks a decisive pivot towards technology-driven development. India leads as the region's digital innovator, closely followed by Thailand and Bangladesh, reflecting diverse but converging trajectories in digital infrastructure, fintech, and e-governance. As cross-border connectivity intensifies across the Bay of Bengal, BIMSTEC's strategic economic significance grows—not only as a regional trade and innovation nexus but as an emerging global digital powerhouse. This momentum underlines the region's ambition to play a defining role in shaping the future architecture of the digital economy.

Urgent Need to Revamp BIMSTEC's Institutional Architecture

Participants stressed that BIMSTEC's current institutional framework is inadequate for the fluid and high-stakes geopolitical and technological environment. Rising geopolitical tensions, the rapid spread of digital currencies, supply chain vulnerabilities, and growing distrust in traditional multilateralism demand a nimble, adaptive institutional model. BIMSTEC must transcend existing inertia by instituting reforms

that enable swift, coordinated decision-making, flexible cooperation, and enhanced resource mobilization. Strengthening sector-specific coordination and streamlining governance processes are essential for the organization to effectively navigate volatility and technological disruption. A revitalized institutional architecture is critical—not only for protecting regional interests but for positioning BIMSTEC as a proactive architect of the Indo-Pacific’s evolving security and economic order.

Accelerating Digitalisation Amid Persistent Structural Vulnerabilities

Digital transformation is reshaping BIMSTEC’s key sectors—education, healthcare, governance, and commerce—with technologies like AI, IoT, and cloud computing embedded into public services and private enterprises alike. The region boasts some of the highest global rates of mobile and social media penetration, signaling strong consumer readiness and digital engagement. Yet, heavy reliance on imported high-end technologies exposes systemic fragilities and curtails long-term autonomy. Addressing this requires concerted investment in indigenous innovation ecosystems, focused on R&D, infrastructure, and talent cultivation. By nurturing homegrown technological capabilities, BIMSTEC can mitigate dependency risks, promote inclusive growth, and bolster regional resilience. This imperative demands harmonized policies and regional cooperation to unlock the digital economy’s full potential.

Escalating Cyber Threats and Digital Vulnerabilities

BIMSTEC’s digital ascent comes with mounting exposure to cyber risks. In 2023, global cybercrime costs hit an estimated US \$8 billion, with BIMSTEC states collectively reporting over one million incidents—ranging from phishing and ransomware to sophisticated DDoS attacks. The proliferation of cyber-enabled fraud, deepfakes, and the abuse of digital currencies threatens economic stability, national security, and public trust. These challenges are exacerbated by uneven digital maturity across members, fragmented legal frameworks, and a lack of indigenous cybersecurity innovation. Moreover, absent unified digital industrialization strategies, regional cyber resilience remains fragile. A coordinated, multi-layered regional response is imperative: strengthening cybersecurity standards, enhancing legal interoperability, and investing in domestic innovation to safeguard BIMSTEC’s digital sovereignty.

The Imperative for Deeper Regional Coordination

Participants highlighted the critical need to elevate regional coordination to confront the growing complexity of cybersecurity threats and digital governance challenges. Priorities include joint capacity-building, best practice exchanges, legal harmonization, and development of shared digital infrastructure and cyber norms. Effective mechanisms for mutual assistance in cybercrime investigations were emphasized to enhance collective resilience. India’s leadership, especially via National Security Advisers’ meetings and the Expert Group on Cybersecurity Cooperation under the National Security Council Secretariat, has

been pivotal in fostering trust and dialogue. The adoption of a Five-Year Action Plan on Cybersecurity Cooperation marks a milestone, institutionalizing collaboration and fostering a secure, region-wide digital ecosystem. Realizing these goals demands sustained political will and equitable resource-sharing among member states.

Strengthening Regional Frameworks for Cybersecurity

The Five-Year Action Plan on Cybersecurity Cooperation provides a strategic foundation for deepening BIMSTEC's regional collaboration in the digital domain. Among its flagship initiatives is the establishment of a BIMSTEC CERT-to-CERT Network, designed to enable real-time information exchange and coordinated responses to cyber incidents. Another key pillar is the Cybercrime Cooperation Framework, which seeks to harmonize procedures for handling digital evidence and foster legal collaboration across jurisdictions. Additionally, the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Colombo, Sri Lanka is positioned as a regional hub for innovation, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, best practices, and emerging technologies. Together, these initiatives signal BIMSTEC's commitment to building a secure, resilient, and inclusive digital ecosystem. They also reflect the region's ambition to lead by example in shaping forward-looking norms for cyber governance and digital sustainability. Ensuring successful implementation will require sustained political will, resource investment, and active engagement from all member states.

From Strategy to Execution: The Call for Action

While BIMSTEC has made commendable progress in cybersecurity policy formulation, participants underscored that impactful change hinges on effective and timely implementation. Member states must proactively protect critical digital infrastructure and tackle escalating cybercrime. The diversity in cybersecurity capabilities across members presents an opportunity for structured knowledge-sharing and technical collaboration rather than a barrier. A key proposal is a regional cyber threat databank to facilitate real-time intelligence exchange, build trust, reduce redundancy, and enhance collective preparedness. Emphasizing operational readiness, joint cyber exercises, and institutionalized cooperation will be vital. Transitioning from policy documents to on-ground action requires sustained leadership, resource allocation, and a shared urgency to secure BIMSTEC's digital future.

Building a Sustainable Cybersecurity Ecosystem

To foster a resilient and inclusive cybersecurity environment across BIMSTEC, it is imperative to adopt a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach that integrates legal, informational, institutional, human resource, and infrastructural pillars. Legal collaboration must prioritize harmonizing cybersecurity and data protection laws across member states to enable seamless cross-border cooperation. Transparency

and information sharing are crucial to improving collective situational awareness and pre-empting cyber threats. Institutional readiness requires strengthening existing bodies and establishing new mechanisms to effectively govern the digital landscape. Investing in human capital through robust STEM education programs, targeted cybersecurity training, and continuous talent development is essential to build a skilled workforce capable of navigating evolving cyber challenges. Finally, strategic infrastructure development should focus on creating regional AI ecosystems, securing data centers, and conducting joint cyber exercises. Universities, research institutions, and think tanks should be actively engaged to promote regional training initiatives and cultivate a culture of cyber awareness, thereby embedding resilience and collaboration at every societal level.

Aligning with Global Cybersecurity Norms and Best Practices

In a rapidly globalizing digital environment, BIMSTEC must strive to align its cybersecurity frameworks and data governance models with established international standards to bolster regional credibility and operational coherence. This includes selectively adapting globally recognized instruments such as the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime and the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to fit regional realities and priorities. Key provisions, including mandatory breach notification protocols, frameworks for cross-border cooperation, and platform accountability measures, are essential components that can foster trust and transparency within and beyond the region. While complete adoption of these frameworks may not be immediately feasible for all member states, integrating their core principles incrementally into national and regional laws will enhance regulatory coherence and facilitate a shared understanding of cyber risks and responsibilities. This strategic alignment will position BIMSTEC as a credible and forward-looking actor in the global digital governance ecosystem.

Establishing a Comprehensive BIMSTEC Cyber Defence Exercise Programme

Enhancing regional cyber readiness and operational collaboration necessitates the creation of a dedicated BIMSTEC Cyber Defence Exercise Programme, structured to address diverse stakeholder needs and threat scenarios. Central to this initiative is the formation of the Cyber Defence Exercise Secretariat (CDES), tasked with planning, coordinating, and evaluating all regional cybersecurity drills. The programme should implement a tiered framework to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness: Tier 1 will focus on tabletop exercises for policymakers and national Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) to simulate high-level decision-making; Tier 2 will involve technical simulations tailored for infrastructure operators and cybersecurity professionals to address operational vulnerabilities; Tier 3 will comprise advanced Red Team-Blue Team live drills, replicating real-world adversarial cyberattacks, including emerging threats like AI-driven phishing campaigns and transnational ransomware operations. Supplementing these exercises, the BIMSTEC Cyber Coordination Portal will facilitate real-time communication and intelligence sharing, while the development of a Cyber Resilience Index will provide measurable benchmarks for cybersecurity

maturity across member states. Collectively, these measures will standardize cyber preparedness and enhance the region's ability to respond cohesively to complex threats.

Charting a Roadmap for Legal and Regulatory Convergence

To ensure a unified and robust regional cybersecurity framework, BIMSTEC should pursue the establishment of a Cyber Norms Charter, harmonizing international principles with the region's unique priorities and challenges. This initiative would be overseen by a newly created BIMSTEC Interoperability Task Force, charged with defining critical regulatory domains such as data protection standards, ethical guidelines for artificial intelligence, encryption protocols, and incident reporting mechanisms. The Task Force's work would be operationalized through joint pilot projects and regulatory sandboxes designed to test proposed norms in real-world conditions, thereby facilitating iterative improvements and practical evaluation. By fostering regulatory convergence, this collaborative process will not only enhance interoperability among member states but also consolidate BIMSTEC's collective influence in international cyber governance forums. Ultimately, the development of a unified regional stance on cyber norms will enable BIMSTEC to proactively shape emerging global standards and secure an interoperable, secure digital ecosystem.

Creating a BIMSTEC Cybersecurity Rapid Response Task Force

Given the escalating frequency and sophistication of cyber threats, the establishment of a dedicated Cybersecurity Rapid Response Task Force is essential for coordinated regional defense and resilience. This expert body would be tasked with orchestrating joint cyber drills, issuing early warnings, and providing technical assistance during incidents, particularly focusing on supporting member states with limited resources such as Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan. By centralizing expertise and operational capacity, the Task Force would ensure swift, efficient, and equitable responses to cybersecurity incidents, reducing response time and minimizing damage. Its inclusive mandate would promote capacity building across the region, fostering a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility. Such a mechanism will enhance trust among member states, ensuring that all BIMSTEC countries, regardless of their resource base, are equipped to confront evolving cyber threats effectively.

Establishing a BIMSTEC Technology Forecasting Group for Strategic Foresight

To stay ahead of rapidly evolving cyber and security threats emerging from frontier technologies, BIMSTEC should institute a Technology Forecasting Group dedicated to strategic foresight and anticipatory governance. This body would conduct rigorous assessments of emerging risks linked to technologies such as AI weaponization, quantum computing breakthroughs, and space-based surveillance capabilities. By identifying potential threats early, the group can inform policymaking, guide the development of adaptive legal frameworks, and prioritize investment in mitigation strategies. Furthermore, this foresight mechanism will enable BIMSTEC to coordinate regional responses to technological disruptions, ensuring

preparedness and resilience while facilitating collaborative innovation. In doing so, the region will not only safeguard its digital infrastructure but also position itself as a leader in addressing complex security challenges posed by emerging technologies.

Advocating for a Legally Binding Global Convention on Cyber Governance

BIMSTEC is uniquely positioned to champion the creation of a legally binding international convention on cyber governance that promotes transparency, cooperation, and secure digital norms worldwide. Drawing lessons from successful global governance models like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), this advocacy would underscore the region's commitment to shaping a rules-based digital order. A global cyber governance convention would set clear standards and accountability mechanisms to manage cross-border cyber risks, protect critical infrastructure, and foster international cooperation in combating cybercrime. By spearheading this initiative, BIMSTEC would elevate its diplomatic profile and reinforce its role as a credible voice in international cyber policy discussions. This proactive stance would not only contribute to global digital security but also amplify BIMSTEC's influence in defining the architecture of future cyber governance regimes.

Recommendations

- Reform BIMSTEC's institutional structure to enable faster, flexible decision-making and better coordination.
- Invest in indigenous digital innovation to reduce reliance on imported technologies.
- Strengthen regional cybersecurity through harmonized laws, standards, and joint action.
- Develop a BIMSTEC CERT-to-CERT Network for real-time cyber incident coordination.
- Implement the Cybercrime Cooperation Framework to streamline digital evidence handling and legal collaboration.
- Operationalize the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Colombo for innovation and tech sharing.
- Establish a regional cyber threat databank for intelligence sharing and preparedness.
- Conduct joint cyber defence exercises to build operational readiness.
- Create a BIMSTEC Cyber Defence Exercise Programme with multiple tiers of simulations.
- Set up a Cyber Coordination Portal and Cyber Resilience Index for communication and benchmarking.
- Harmonize cybersecurity and data protection laws across member states.
- Develop a Cyber Norms Charter through a new Interoperability Task Force.

- Use pilot projects and sandboxes to test and refine regional digital regulations.
- Establish a Cybersecurity Rapid Response Task Force for quick support during cyber incidents.
- Create a Technology Forecasting Group to anticipate and plan for emerging tech threats.
- Align with global norms like the Budapest Convention and GDPR where feasible.
- Champion a legally binding international convention on cyber governance.

Session 5 - Harnessing Track 2 Dialogues for Stronger BIMSTEC Cooperation

The session was moderated by Dr. Arvind Gupta, Director of the Vivekananda International Foundation. The speakers included Dr. Md. Mizanur Rahman, Joint Secretary from the Public Security Division of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Bangladesh; Mr. Pasang Dorji, Director General of the Department of Law and Order, Ministry of Home Affairs, Bhutan; Police Brigadier General Kyaw Zaya, Head of the Division against Transnational Crime, Myanmar Police Force, Myanmar; Mr. Narayan Prasad Sapkota, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal; Brigadier Pradeep Ratnayake, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Defence and Administration) at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka; and Mr. Ruchakorn Napapornpipat, Deputy Secretary General, Office of the National Security Council, Thailand. Some of the salient points discussed were:

Enhancing BIMSTEC Cooperation: Progress and Challenges

Since its establishment in 1997, BIMSTEC has come a long way in achieving its broad noble mission of creating safe, secure, and developed BIMSTEC nations. Home to nearly one-fourth of humanity and a fast-growing economic zone with a GDP of over \$5.2 trillion, BIMSTEC represents a unique convergence of South and Southeast Asia, offering a vital platform to foster regional integration, strategic alignment and sustainable security cooperation.

Demonstrating socio-economic disparities across macroeconomic indicators of Member States, the trajectory of economic growth in the region has been a mixed bag. While some nations display robust GDP figures, some states continue to grapple with challenges such as unemployment and inflation. Hand-holding strategies have been an important feature of intra-BIMSTEC cooperation. With India at the forefront of development, greater engagement within the bloc can ensure that such disparities become a thing of the past.

Over the course of the Track 1.5 Dialogue spanning 5 sessions, delegations from across the BIMSTEC Member States agreed on most recommendations put forward on issues of regional concern. Each Member

State has its own individually evolved institutional frameworks, which can strengthen the collaboration and coordination across countries. Complementing formal government diplomacy, Track 2 engagement helps towards bridging the gap between official and unofficial actors, thereby enhancing regional cooperation. These dialogues also facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise, which is crucial in addressing non-traditional security challenges that transcend national borders.

Addressing Transnational Challenges: Advancing BIMSTEC's Regional Security and Resilience

In an era of rising transnational challenges across porous borders, there is a critical role of technology, joint efforts, and strategic institutions in enhancing BIMSTEC'S regional security and disaster preparedness. With a focus on emerging technologies, strategic cooperation proposals on joint disaster response, rescue operations, and CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear) initiatives can institutionalize support against non-traditional security threats confronting the region.

In terms of health security, the Covid-19 pandemic brought to the forefront the need for a regional health framework with shared data, joint research and stronger rapid-response systems in order to build a health firewall that spans all BIMSTEC borders. In addition, setting up secure communication platforms for real-time intelligence sharing on terrorism and radicalization can underscore regional security capacity-building.

In the realm of digital challenges, it is imperative to keep pace with the rapid evolution of cybercrime. With a greater focus on artificial intelligence (AI) and its ethical deployment, the region can move towards ensuring resilient critical infrastructure. Further, the spread of extremist ideologies via social media platforms raises the issue of neighbourhood cooperation through policy alignment and intelligence sharing. Although divergent threat perceptions among various stakeholders within BIMSTEC often hamper effective cooperation, there is an urgent need to promote digital literacy across the region to protect it from disinformation campaigns.

Bridging Minds and Borders: The Strategic Role of Think Tanks in BIMSTEC Integration

Promoting institutionalized interaction between think tanks can provide a space for creative and candid discussions, outside the scope of formal inter-governmental negotiations. This can encourage innovative ideas which will further strengthen effective policy-making. In complex and emerging fields of cyber-security, artificial intelligence, and other rising threats, there is a need for specialized knowledge and research-based insights, in order to bridge the gap between ambition and implementation. Informal diplomacy can play a significant role in fostering long-term trust and understanding between stakeholders across Member States.

It is important for the BIMSTEC governments to look beyond their think tanks as mere observers, and to perceive them as partners providing valuable insights into regional realities. Think tanks play a

significant role in not just shaping policies, but in building real human connections through people-to-people connectivity across BIMSTEC countries. Through open dialogue and neutral platforms for conflict resolution and consensus building, think tank engagement has the potential to create evidence-based recommendations tailored to BIMSTEC realities.

Empower and Strengthen the BIMSTEC Secretariat

To foster deeper regional integration and ensure efficient coordination of the wide array of initiatives across the BIMSTEC framework, it is essential to significantly enhance the institutional capacity of the BIMSTEC Secretariat. A strengthened Secretariat would be better equipped to identify and address structural gaps, support timely implementation of decisions taken at the highest levels, and act as the primary institutional anchor for sustained regional cooperation. Institutional empowerment must include adequate staffing, resources, and a clear mandate to act as a strategic facilitator of BIMSTEC's collective agenda.

Develop Coordinated Cyber and Maritime Security Task Forces

In light of the rapidly evolving and transnational nature of security threats, BIMSTEC should prioritize the establishment of coordinated task forces dedicated to cyber and maritime defence. These specialized units would enable Member States to jointly respond to shared challenges through synchronized training programmes, real-time intelligence exchange, and the development of interoperable operational frameworks. Such task forces would also enhance regional preparedness and trust in dealing with complex security issues, including cybercrime, maritime piracy, trafficking, and other non-traditional threats.

Institutionalize BIMSTEC Youth Dialogues for Future Leadership

Engaging the youth of BIMSTEC Member States through structured dialogues can cultivate a strong sense of regional belonging and prepare the next generation to actively contribute to regional peace and prosperity. Regularly convened BIMSTEC Youth Dialogues would provide a platform for young leaders to deliberate on shared challenges, build mutual understanding, and contribute fresh ideas to the regional agenda. This initiative would help ensure intergenerational continuity in BIMSTEC cooperation and foster long-term social and political cohesion.

Establish Mechanisms to Strengthen Collaboration with Think Tanks, Academia, and Civil Society

A more robust and inclusive policy-making process within BIMSTEC requires deeper engagement with the region's intellectual, academic, and civil society actors. Each Member State has developed institutions and expertise that, if networked effectively, can significantly contribute to regional strategy and cooperation. To this end, establishing a BIMSTEC Centre for Strategic Studies and a regional Track 2 Think Tank

Hub would institutionalize joint research, policy dialogues, and capacity-building. Additionally, a BIMSTEC Knowledge and Policy Network could facilitate continuous interaction across sectors, promote the generation of context-sensitive knowledge, and help translate policy ideas into actionable strategies aligned with regional realities.

Build and Maintain Sustained Political Will to Advance Regional Cooperation

Long-term success of BIMSTEC initiatives depends critically on the continued political commitment of its Member States. It is essential to maintain high-level political momentum that transcends short-term national interests and administrative cycles. Sustained political will is key to overcoming bureaucratic hurdles, ensuring inter-agency coordination, and aligning national priorities with shared regional objectives. Regular high-level interactions and political backing will create the enabling environment necessary to implement collective decisions and respond cohesively to emerging regional challenges.

Ensure Institutional Follow-Through and Implementation via National Security Channels

For the ideas and observations emerging from the Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue to have concrete impact, it is crucial that they are deliberated upon at formal intergovernmental platforms such as the Meeting of BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs. Following this, the actionable recommendations should be channelled to the relevant Joint Working Groups for operational planning and implementation. This institutional follow-through mechanism would help bridge the gap between dialogue and delivery, ensuring that strategic discussions translate into effective policy outcomes on the ground.

Recommendations

- Empower and Strengthen the BIMSTEC Secretariat by enhancing its institutional capacity, staffing, resources, and mandate to serve as a strategic facilitator for regional cooperation and decision implementation.
- Harmonizing of the participation of security chiefs at the top levels in BIMSTEC NSAs Dialogue [Currently, participation in BIMSTEC NSAs dialogue happens at various levels by different member countries. Important to keep uniformity of participation at top security chiefs' level].
- Develop Coordinated Cyber and Maritime Security Task Forces to jointly address emerging security threats through shared training, real-time intelligence exchange, and interoperable operational frameworks among Member States.
- Institutionalize BIMSTEC Youth Dialogues to engage young leaders from Member States in structured, regular discussions aimed at cultivating regional identity, leadership, and long-term cohesion.

- Establish Mechanisms to Strengthen Collaboration with Think Tanks, Academia, and Civil Society, including the creation of a BIMSTEC Centre for Strategic Studies, a Track 2 Think Tank Hub, and a BIMSTEC Knowledge and Policy Network for joint research, policy exchange, and capacity-building.
- Build and Maintain Sustained Political Will by securing high-level political commitment to regional cooperation that overcomes bureaucratic inertia, aligns national and regional priorities, and ensures implementation of agreed initiatives.
- Ensure Institutional Follow-Through and Implementation via National Security Channels, with recommendations from Track 1.5 dialogues to be reviewed by National Security Chiefs and operationalized through relevant Joint Working Groups.

Concluding Session

The concluding session of the 4th BIMSTEC Track 1.5 Security Dialogue featured a comprehensive address by Mr. Indra Mani Pandey, Secretary General of BIMSTEC, followed by a dynamic discussion chaired by Dr Arvind Gupta, Director of the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF). In his closing remarks, the Secretary General highlighted the growing cooperation among BIMSTEC member states, strengthening the organisation. The Secretary General also acknowledged the significant contributions of Sri Lanka and Thailand during their respective chairmanships of the BIMSTEC, which have helped in advancing the BIMSTEC agenda.

Under Sri Lanka's leadership, BIMSTEC achieved an important institutional milestone with the conclusion and adoption of the BIMSTEC Charter. Sri Lanka also initiated the Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and played a significant role in formulating the Rules of Procedure. These initiatives by Sri Lanka laid a strong foundation for enhancing the legal and institutional framework in BIMSTEC. Additionally, Sri Lanka proposed the establishment of an expert group on monetary and fiscal policies, marking another important step toward the region's economic integration.

The Secretary General also lauded Thailand's contribution during its nearly three-year tenure as Chair. Thailand introduced the concept of Foreign Ministers' Retreats, which were held twice and served as platforms for generating fresh ideas and proposals to deepen regional cooperation. Furthermore, Thailand also initiated regular meetings of BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. These meetings on the world stage helped in expanding BIMSTEC's strategic dialogue and international engagement.

The Secretary General acknowledged the pivotal role of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat in Dhaka in fostering regional cooperation by bringing the member states together on a common platform. The Secretariat in Dhaka has been instrumental in highlighting the key issues shared by the BIMSTEC members. The Secretariat has also become a platform for proposing areas of cooperation between the member states.

Notable initiatives include cooperation in digital public infrastructure and Artificial Intelligence (AI). A landmark workshop on AI, organised in partnership with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), saw participation from all BIMSTEC member states.

The Secretary General also highlighted the importance of the expert group on monetary and fiscal policies, an initiative proposed by Sri Lanka, which aims to enhance macroeconomic coordination within the region. He emphasised that such initiatives reflect BIMSTEC's growing commitment to expand into new and emerging areas and consolidate existing sectors of cooperation.

Existing challenges also accompany the recent positive developments of the BIMSTEC. The implementation of decisions and policies in the BIMSTEC is a significant challenge within the organisation. The General Secretary stressed moving beyond traditional coordination through foreign ministries and national meetings. He suggested that there should be direct linkages between various government ministries and institutions. For example, direct interaction between external and internal security ministries across member states could lead to more robust and effective collaboration. Establishing these institutional linkages would foster ground-level cooperation, facilitate better communication, and lead to practical outcomes.

Further, the Secretary General reiterated the sentiments of many experts at the 4th BIMSTEC Track 1.5 Security Dialogue regarding the need to strengthen institutional connectivity between relevant ministries, institutions, and agencies within member states. Greater attention must be given to implementing existing action plans, conventions, and Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs).

The Secretary General also acknowledged the vital role of think tanks in advancing the BIMSTEC agenda. Although institutional mechanisms like the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks and the Track 1.5 Security Dialogue exist, the broader community of think tanks across member states is far more diverse and dynamic than what these current structures encompass. He emphasised the need to engage more extensively with this wider intellectual community to enrich policy dialogue and strengthen regional cooperation. The Secretary General proposed the creation of a more inclusive and open network of think tanks—one not limited to a single institution per country, but open to any think tank with a willingness to contribute. Such a network would ensure more diverse inputs and wider participation in official and informal deliberations. The Secretary General confirmed that he had noted the various recommendations the heads of delegations and participants made during the conference. These recommendations, he assured, would be studied closely and developed into concrete proposals to be shared with the member states.

In conclusion, the Secretary General expressed his sincere appreciation to the VIF for organising the event and to the National Security Council Secretariat for its leadership in fostering cooperation in the security sector. He noted that the dialogue had helped create synergies in areas where national security advisors have initiated cooperation. Looking ahead, he highlighted the anticipated meeting of BIMSTEC Home

Ministers. The Secretary General concluded on an optimistic note, stating that the combined efforts of national security mechanisms, supported by vibrant think tank networks and a proactive Secretariat, will provide the necessary momentum for BIMSTEC to progress meaningfully.

Following the comprehensive address by the Secretary General of the BIMSTEC, the concluding session also featured interaction with the participants of the security dialogue, reflecting the dynamic nature of regional cooperation under the BIMSTEC framework. There was a proposal to institutionalise think tank participation across BIMSTEC's sectoral divisions. It was suggested that each BIMSTEC country should nominate a corresponding think tank to act as a sectoral knowledge hub. These think tanks could support agenda-setting, research coordination, and cross-sectoral collaboration. The Secretary General welcomed the idea and stated that it would be helpful to have similar Track 1.5 interactions in our sectors, similar to BIMSTEC members' interactions in the Security Dialogue.

A proposal was made to establish designated focal points for real-time reporting and coordination of security incidents across member states of BIMSTEC, particularly in light of recurring issues such as maritime crime, organised crime, and cyber threats. The Secretary General explained that the current security action plans already provide for member states' designation of focal points. He also highlighted that similar mechanisms were under consideration for emerging challenges like cyber security.

While discussing the organisation's history, the Secretary General highlighted BIMSTEC's greatest success and its most significant shortcoming since its inception. The foremost achievement was the creation of a comprehensive framework for sectoral cooperation, including forming joint working groups, expert groups, and legally binding instruments. However, there have been issues with implementing the aforementioned frameworks. Irregular and infrequent meetings—especially of expert and working groups—were considered a significant bottleneck. In some cases, expert groups had not convened for years. The Secretary General stressed the need for regular, coordinated engagement among ministries of foreign affairs and sectoral ministries to ensure steady progress.

The discussion also touched on BIMSTEC's limited media and academic visibility. It was suggested that the Secretariat provide more frequent data and updates to improve awareness and stakeholder engagement. The need to preserve BIMSTEC's unique, apolitical character, which has helped it avoid internal divisions, was also discussed. The Secretary General also highlighted ongoing institutional reforms and the gradual implementation of the recommendations put forth by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG). These reforms are expected to strengthen the organisation's capacity for regional cooperation, including the potential integration of innovative public-private collaboration models.

The Secretary General also emphasised that the BIMSTEC is not attempting to replicate the model of any single member state. Instead, BIMSTEC functions as a unique regional platform that brings together South and Southeast Asian countries. The organisation has developed its approach, primarily fostering economic and technical cooperation to address shared challenges among its member states.

The session underscored the pragmatic and inclusive direction being charted by the BIMSTEC Secretariat. The discussion after the security dialogue reflected a clear understanding of the potential and the challenges faced by BIMSTEC. The Secretary General repeatedly emphasised the importance of implementation, institutional coordination, and the cultivation of a vibrant knowledge ecosystem, especially the think tanks. The discussion highlighted that the success of BIMSTEC hinges not only on state-led mechanisms but also on the active participation of civil society, think tanks, and the private sector across the region.

Speakers

BIMSTEC Secretariat
Mr. Indra Mani Pandey, BIMSTEC Secretary General
BANGLADESH
Dr. Md Mizanur Rahman, Joint Secretary, Public Security Division, MHA
Dr. Kazi Maruful Islam, Policy and Research Advisor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka
Mr. Md. Rafid Abrar Miah, Research Officer, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies
BHUTAN
Mr. Dasho Karma Tshiteem, Governing Board Member, Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies
Kencho Dema, Sr. Research Officer, Centre for Bhutan and GNH Studies, Thimphu
Mr. Pasang Dorji, Director General, Department of Law and Order, MHA
MYANMAR
Police Brigadier General Kyaw Zaya, Head of Division against Transnational Crime, Myanmar Police Force
Mr. Htet Phyo Aung, Deputy Director, Ministry of Transport and Communications
Mr. Lahpai Zau Goone, Senior Advisory Member, Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies

NEPAL
Mr. Narayan Prasad Sapkota, Joint Secretary, MHA
Mr. Nishan Raj Gautam, Under Secretary, MHA
Mr. Pharshu Ram Bhattarai, Section Officer, MHA
SRI LANKA
Brigadier Pradeep Ratnayake, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Defense and Administration), General Sir John Kotelawala Defense University
Commander Bhanu Abeygunawardhana, Military Research Officer, Institute of National Security Studies of Sri Lanka - Ministry of Defence
Wing Commander Charith Maheepala, Assistant Military Assistant to Secretary Defence, Ministry of Defense
THAILAND
Mr. Ruchakorn Napapornpipat, Deputy Secretary General, Office of National Security Council
Captain Panuphun Rakkeo, Management Director of Surveillance, Monitoring and System Division, THAI-MECC Operations Centre
Dr. Wasin Punthong, Lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University
INDIA
Mr. Pavan Kapoor, DNSA (Strategic Affairs), NSCS
Dr. Arvind Gupta, Director, Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi
Vice Admiral Sanjay Mahindru (Retd), Former Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, Indian Navy
Captain Anurag Bisen (Retd), Senior Fellow, VIF
Mr. Lekhan Thakkar, Joint Secretary, NSCS
Dr. Constantino Xavier, Senior Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)
Mr. Jayant Misra, Former Director General, Revenue Intelligence, India and Regional Consultant, UNODC
Mr. Anurag Sharma, Associate Fellow, VIF
Dr. Gulshan Rai, Distinguished Fellow, VIF
Mr. Sudhir Saxena, Senior Fellow, VIF

Glimpses from the Dialogue



Inaugural Session



Session 1- Strengthening Maritime Security in the Bay of Bengal



Session 2- Economic Security and Connectivity in the Bay of Bengal Region



Session 3- Tackling Transnational Organized Crime Through Regional Cooperation



Session 4 - Cybersecurity Challenges and Emerging Technologies

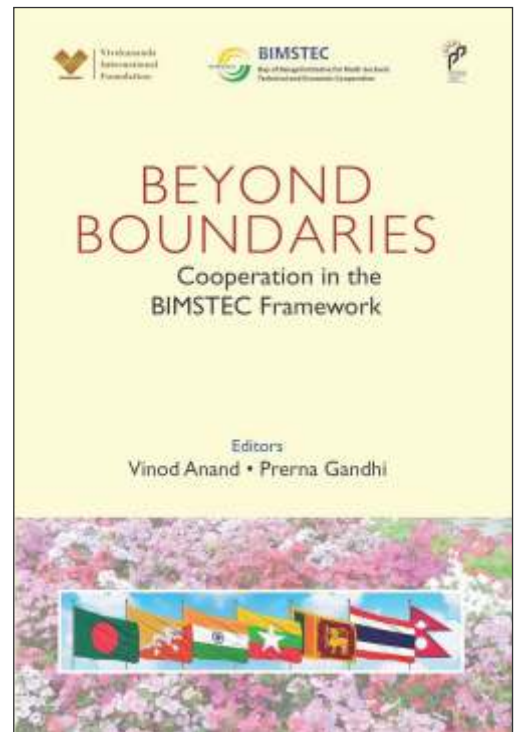


Session 5 - Harnessing Track 2 Dialogues for Stronger BIMSTEC Cooperation



About the Book

Beyond Boundaries: Cooperation in the BIMSTEC Framework, edited by Vinod Anand and Perna Gandhi, offers a comprehensive examination of the evolving role of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in shaping South and Southeast Asia's future. This timely collection explores BIMSTEC's potential in addressing regional challenges such as economic integration, maritime security, climate change, and non-traditional security threats. With contributions from experts across various fields, the book highlights opportunities for deeper collaboration, from fostering economic connectivity to tackling transnational crime. Emphasizing the importance of cross-border cooperation, the volume advocates for an inclusive and resilient approach to regional integration. Ultimately, it provides a roadmap for BIMSTEC nations to unlock collective strengths and achieve sustainable, shared prosperity.



About the VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

The Vivekananda International Foundation is an independent non-partisan institution that conducts research and analysis on domestic and international issues, and offers a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. Some of India's leading practitioners from the fields of security, military, diplomacy, government, academia and media fields have come together to generate ideas and stimulate action on national security issues.

The defining feature of VIF lies in its provision of core institutional support which enables the organization to be flexible in its approach and proactive in changing circumstances, with a long-term focus on India's strategic, developmental and civilisational interests. The VIF aims to channelize fresh insights and decades of experience harnessed from its faculty into fostering actionable ideas for the nation's stakeholders.

Since its establishment, VIF has successfully embarked on quality research and scholarship in an effort to highlight issues in governance and strengthen national security. This is being actualized through numerous activities like seminars, round tables, interactive-dialogues, Vimarsh (public discourse), conferences and briefings. The publications of the VIF form the lasting deliverables of the organisation's aspiration to impact on the prevailing discourse on issues concerning India's national interest.

For more information

