



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation: Action Plans and Recommendations for Policy Makers

Project Director

Biren Nanda

Authors

Mohit Musaddi

Gopika Shinghal

SEPTEMBER 2018



Delhi Policy Group

Core 5-A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

www.delhipolicygroup.org



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Senior Fellow
Delhi Policy Group

Authors

Mohit Musaddi

Research Associate
Delhi Policy Group

and

Gopika Shinghal

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DPG Policy Report

ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group is among India's oldest independent think tanks with its primary focus on international and strategic issues of critical national interest. Over the past decades, the Delhi Policy Group has established itself in both domestic and international circles, particularly in the area of national security.

In keeping with India's increasing global profile as a leading power and the accompanying dynamism of India's foreign and security policy, the Delhi Policy Group has expanded its focus areas to include India's broader regional and global role; India's initiatives to strengthen its strategic periphery; India's political, security and connectivity challenges and policies across the Indo-Pacific; and the strategic partnerships that advance India's rise. To support these goals, the DPG undertakes research, publishes policy reports and organises conferences on strategic and geo-political, geo-economic, and defence and security issues.

Disclaimer:

Opinions and recommendations in the report are exclusively of the author(s) and not of any other individual or institution.

Photographs:

Picture 1: A photograph of the BIMSTEC Heads of Missions in the Regional Conference in New Delhi along with the Director General of DPG Ambassador H.K. Singh and Project Director Ambassador Biren Nanda.

Source: Delhi Policy Group

Picture 2: The DPG Regional Conference in Yangon, Myanmar.

Source: Delhi Policy Group

Picture 3: BIMSTEC Secretary General M. Shahidul Islam delivering Valedictory Address in the conference in New Delhi.

Source: Delhi Policy Group

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India Habitat Centre,

Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

When the Delhi Policy Group commenced its journey to take stock of ongoing efforts at promoting BIMSTEC Regional Cooperation in April 2018, we did not anticipate the groundswell of interest particularly in India's neighbours like Myanmar and Sri Lanka. With SAARC in the doldrums, BIMSTEC began to be perceived as the region's last chance to reap the benefits of regional integration. The fact that BIMSTEC also acts as a bridge between South Asia and South East Asia provided an added impetus to the conferences. In both the conference venues outside Delhi, namely Yangon and Colombo, scholars and experts from Delhi played a crucial role in socializing the event and encouraging local participation. Deliberations at the three capitals also revealed nuanced differences in their approach towards future action plans. On Day 2, the three conferences brainstormed two-year Action Plans for BIMSTEC, leaving behind a lasting outcome of the exercise.

These conferences were the outcome of sustained efforts and interest on part of many colleagues who contributed to putting them together. First and foremost, we would like to acknowledge the contributions of Ambassador H. K. Singh, the Director General of DPG without whose guidance and leadership this project would not have come to fruition.

We owe a debt of gratitude also to Dr. Sagar Prasai, Country Director, Asia Foundation and Ms. Diya Nag, Head Programs Officer, Asia Foundation for their guidance and ideas, which contributed to continuous improvement in the conference process and outcomes. We are grateful to Asia Foundation for funding support for the conferences without which the project would have not been possible.

We are also grateful to the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS) and the Centre for Economic Development (CESD) for serving as local partners in our conference in Yangon.

Amongst academic colleagues, Professor Prabir De of the RIS has played a stellar role both in chairing and mentoring sessions and in advising on the planning of the conferences, contributing papers and sharing his insights and deep knowledge of the subject.

Last but not the least we would like to acknowledge the contributions of the BIMSTEC Team in DPG, Senior Fellow, Ambassador Biren Nanda, Research Associate, Ms. Shulgana Pal and interns Ms. Devika Makkat and Ms. Aashna John whose tireless efforts helped steer the project to productive outcomes.

Introduction

Beginning in April 2018, the Delhi Policy Group and the Asia Foundation organized three Regional Conferences on Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation. Participants in the conferences were drawn from Delhi, Bangkok, Colombo, Dhaka, Kathmandu, Thimpu and Yangon. They comprised of academics, scholars, experts, representatives of civil society and media persons. Though intended as a track 2 exercise, the conferences had good participation and support from track 1 officials as well. This series of conferences concluded in August 2018 and the reports on the proceedings of each conference may be seen on the website of the Delhi Policy Group at www.delhipolicygroup.org

Discussions at each of the conferences took place in four thematic areas: Trade and Economic Integration, Transit and Multimodal Connectivity (Roadways, Waterways, Railways and Aviation), Energy, Water, Environment, Climate Change and Other Issues, and People to People Connectivity through Multi-sectoral Engagement. At the three conferences held in Delhi, Yangon and Colombo, the participants were requested to brainstorm and develop two-year Plans of Action for the four thematic areas. A fifth thematic area focusing on Advancing Gender Issues in the BIMSTEC region also yielded plans of actions in all the three conferences.

The report has been divided into six sections. The first section provides details on why BIMSTEC has been acquiring greater traction over the years. Besides acting as a bridge between South Asia and South East Asia, BIMSTEC also provides new opportunities for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and the landlocked countries of the region.

The second section traces the progress of BIMSTEC and lists some significant milestones that have been achieved in recent years including the Free Trade Framework Agreement, the Grid Interconnection Agreement and the efforts made to alleviate poverty in the region. It concludes by asserting that for BIMSTEC to be successful, it has to pay heed to four key challenges.

The third section describes the design of the conferences. It observes the high level of interest evinced by senior track 1 representatives in participating in the discussions and gives an assessment of the achievements of the conferences. Apart from contributing to the discourse on BIMSTEC regional cooperation, the three conferences in Delhi, Yangon and Colombo developed Two Year Action Plans for the five thematic areas of BIMSTEC Regional Cooperation.

The fourth section captures the three Action Plans of each thematic area in a single table – each listing the priorities, the implementation processes and the likely challenges.

The fifth section gives the flavor of some significant proposals / recommendations made by scholars at the conferences.

The sixth section describes some of the key conclusions and takeaways from the conferences.

Why Has BIMSTEC Cooperation Acquired Greater Traction Over Time?

Low Level of Regional Integration in South Asia

Countries in South Asia share a common civilizational heritage and are linked together by common bonds of history and culture. However, the post-colonial emergence of a number of newly independent states in South Asia resulted in the disruption of the natural connectivity within the region, leaving South Asia as one of the least integrated regions in the world.

Intra-regional trade as a percentage of total trade is one indicator of regional economic integration. Here too South Asia performs very poorly with intra-regional trade accounting for less than 5% of total trade. In contrast, the ASEAN's intra-regional trade accounts for 25% of its total trade. The low level of regional integration has also manifested itself in low levels of intra-regional investment. Existing barriers have hindered the flow of capital and qualified human resources within South Asia.

BIMSTEC connects South Asia with the Southeast Asia and serves as a platform for inter-regional cooperation between SAARC and ASEAN members. It accounts for 21 percent of the world population with a combined GDP of over US\$ 2 trillion, providing huge potential for trade. Intra-regional trade volume is only 7 percent while it can go up to 21 percent if efforts are accelerated and roadblocks are removed.¹ In 2016, BIMSTEC member states together had a staggering total export of approximately US\$ 536.8 billion and an import of US\$ 641.7 billion, thereby making it one of the most actively trade-driven regional blocs of the world.²

¹ "BIMSTEC forum can be alternative to LDC club for the region: Foreign minister". URL: <https://bdnews24.com/economy/2018/03/20/bimstec-forum-can-be-alternative-to-ldc-club-for-the-region-foreign-minister>

² FICCI: Reinigorating BIMSTEC- An Industry Vision for the Next Decade" URL: <http://ficci.in/spdocument/23016/BIMSTEC-Report-final.pdf>

THE BAY OF BENGAL COMMUNITY

Few facts and figures about BIMSTEC member countries

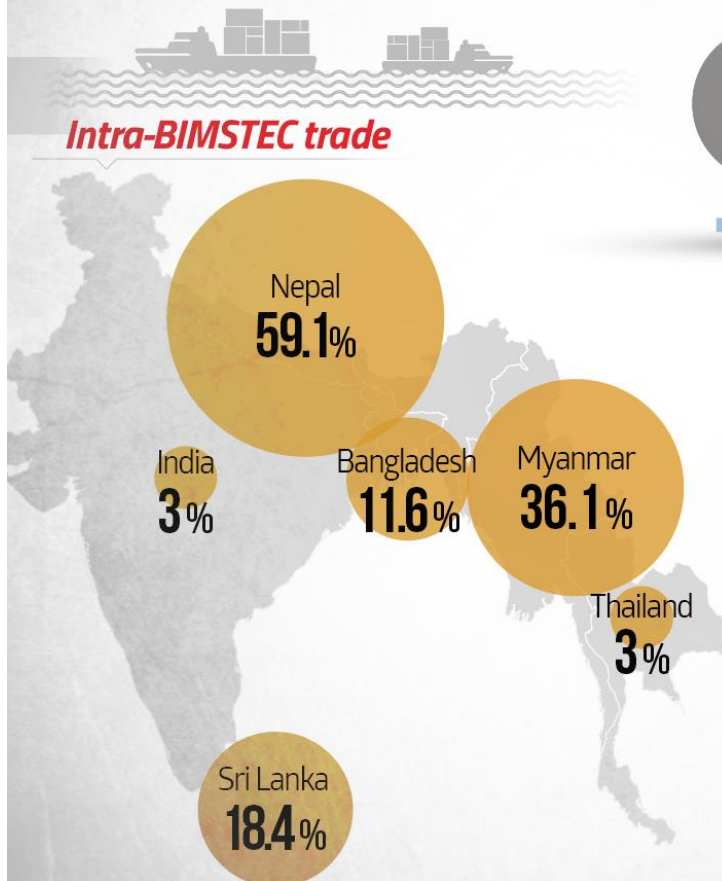


\$2 TRILLION+

Combined GDP of BIMSTEC countries

1.5 billion their combined population
(21% of global population)

Intra-BIMSTEC trade



GDP per capita* (PPP in 2016)



Intra-BIMSTEC trade: share in a country's total trade; Bhutan trade figs: N/A
Sources: Trade data from ORF Online; GDP from Carnegie India

While 59 percent of Nepal's trade is with the BIMSTEC region, only 3 percent of the trade of India and Thailand is with the BIMSTEC countries. However, the combined GDP of the BIMSTEC countries is over 2 trillion USD and represents a huge potential for trade and economic integration in the region. Source: FirstPost

BIMSTEC – A Bridge between South Asia and South East Asia

The geographical contiguity of BIMSTEC member states, abundant natural and human resources, rich historical linkages and shared cultural heritage provides the grouping an ideal platform to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the Bay of Bengal region. Greater regional cooperation is in the mutual interest of the BIMSTEC countries. It was initiated primarily as a combination of India's Look East Policy (now

Act East Policy) and Thailand's Look West Policy. BIMSTEC also provides an opportunity to enhance the criticality of India's Northeastern region by making it a gateway between South and South East Asia.

BIMSTEC constitutes a significant building block for the eventual establishment of a Bay Bengal Economic Community that links the ecologies of the Himalayas to those of the Bay of Bengal. The uniqueness of BIMSTEC is in its multi-sectoral approaches compared to other Asian blocs. This creates another layer of cooperation to ensure quicker integration. Its uniqueness also lies in its structural processes. BIMSTEC cooperation is focused on micro-level cooperation (sectoral cooperation in 14 thematic areas) which will gradually converge to progress macro-level issues. Complementarities in sectoral comparative advantage have already been identified and each country has been asked to play the role of the lead country in one or more specific priority areas.

LDCs and Landlocked Countries of South Asia are the Biggest Gainers

BIMSTEC members are at different levels of development (2 developing, 4 LDCs and 1 middle income country) with different factor endowments. BIMSTEC was formed by the member countries to leverage the synergies in their capabilities and resource endowments for their development. Four BIMSTEC members, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar are in the process of graduating from the "Least Developed Countries" category. Cooperation in BIMSTEC can help them sustain their momentum of development and progress. The BIMSTEC forum can be an alternate to the LDC club.

The countries in South Asia in general and the land-locked countries in particular, are keen to promote connectivity and establish linkages with South East Asian countries by ensuring efficient transit services and greater market access. Similarly, these countries can contribute to the common prosperity of the region by optimizing the use of available resources.

The strategic interests of the two land-locked countries, Nepal and Bhutan in participating at this regional process are five-fold. First, the countries need greater market access to the other member countries in order to reduce/eliminate the tariff and non-tariff barriers and harmonize customs procedures. Second, connectivity by all possible means of transportation and participation in the regional connectivity program for reducing the cost of transit transportation is required. Third, there is a desire to establish linkages of services, particularly on tourism, health and education. Fourth, participation in the regional value chains focusing on emerging manufacturing activities in the three big economies is also crucial. Lastly, participation in BIMSTEC will enhance the inflow of investment from other countries into Nepal and Bhutan.

Thus, implementation of Free Trade in goods and services and the cross-border investment protocol, as envisioned in the Free Trade Framework Agreement is crucial to reap benefits from the growing economic size of the emerging economies of the region.³



Harnessing maritime resources for growth and connectivity will be the key to the prosperity of BIMSTEC in the future. Landlocked countries like Nepal and Bhutan are likely to be the biggest gainers from BIMSTEC cooperation. Source: BIMSTEC

³ Paper presented by Mr. Purushottam Ojha, Former Commerce Secretary, Government of Nepal at the DPG Regional Conference on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' at New Delhi on April 26-27, 2018.

How has BIMSTEC Regional Integration Progressed in Recent Years?

Although BIMSTEC was formed in 1997, the idea of BIMSTEC as a regional grouping has only been gaining traction in the recent years. Geopolitical developments related to deteriorating India-Pakistan relations and the consequent impasse within SAARC have given an impetus to BIMSTEC cooperation. On a more positive note, the outcomes within BIMSTEC are being built upon the solid foundation of good bilateral relations between the seven countries and their desire to push forward with regional integration initiatives. Equally important has been the China factor. To counter China's growing footprint in the region, India feels it must step up in its engagement with its regional neighbors. Further, BIMSTEC integration also owes a lot of its progress to the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) initiative. Some of the progress among the BIMSTEC member countries has been highlighted below.

Free Trade Framework Agreement

One of the most significant achievements for the region has been the signing of the BIMSTEC Free Trade Framework Agreement in 2004. There have been twenty rounds of negotiations post the framework agreement between the member countries where finer details were discussed to convert the framework into a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The BIMSTEC FTA has the potential for bringing more investments into the region besides encouraging developments related to the focused priority projects of trade, transportation, tourism, energy, health and agriculture through collective action. Further, the FTA will also liberalise trade in both goods and services and facilitate economic integration of the region.

Coastal Shipping Agreement

BIMSTEC countries are currently discussing the conclusion of a Coastal Shipping Agreement modelled on a similar agreement signed by BBIN countries. The Coastal Shipping Agreement aims to facilitate coastal shipping in the region, thus boosting trade between the member countries. The agreement applies to coastal shipping, i.e., shipping within 20 nautical miles of the coastline. Coastal shipping is a cost-effective method to promote trade as it requires smaller vessels with lesser draft and thus involves lower costs. The agreement also allows the member countries to move cargo using coastal shipping. Once the agreement has been ratified, a lot of cargo between the member countries can be moved through the cost effective, environment friendly and a much faster coastal shipping route.

Officials of the member states of BIMSTEC met on November 27-28, 2017 in New Delhi to discuss the modalities for promoting coastal shipping in the region.⁴ India is the lead country in BIMSTEC for cooperation in transport and communication and finalisation of the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement will provide a major boost to regional cooperation in BIMSTEC.

Grid Interconnection Agreement

The *MoU on BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection* was signed during the 4th BIMSTEC Summit held in Kathmandu on August 30-31, 2018. "The MoU will provide a broad framework for the Parties to cooperate towards the implementation of grid interconnections for the trade in electricity with a view to promoting rational and optimal power transmission in the BIMSTEC region."⁵ Further, the MoU will also facilitate the optimum use of energy resources in the region, the promotion of an efficient, economic, and secure operation of power system and the exchange of power through cross border interconnections.⁶



The Heads of States of all BIMSTEC countries met for a 4th Summit on August 30-31, 2018 in Kathmandu where they signed the MoU on Grid Interconnection. Source: MEA

⁴ Press Information Bureau (PIB), December 1, 2017, *BIMSTEC Member States discuss draft text of Coastal Shipping Agreement*, Ministry of Shipping, Government of India. URL: <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=174036>

⁵ Press Information Bureau (PIB), April 12, 2017, *Cabinet approves the "Signing and Ratification of MoU for Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection"*, Cabinet, Government of India. URL: <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=160976>

⁶ *Ibid.*

Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA)

At the BIMSTEC leader's retreat in Goa in 2016, the progress achieved in the implementation of the recommendations of the BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study (BTILS) were discussed and the possibility of having a BIMSTEC MVA was also deliberated upon. The BIMSTEC MVA would in all likelihood heavily borrow from elements of the MVA that has already been signed between the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) countries.

Apart from that, India, Thailand and Myanmar are also working on a 1,400-km long trilateral highway that would link India with South East Asia. The highway would boost trade, business, health, education and tourism ties among the three countries and the BIMSTEC MVA would be vital for the success of the currently under-construction highway.⁷

Poverty Alleviation

BIMSTEC has held three ministerial meetings on poverty alleviation in the recent years, the latest one being in Colombo in December 2017. An eleven-point agenda, which included a commitment to the effective implementation of the Poverty Plan of Action (PPA) that was adopted in the second ministerial meeting in 2012 was agreed upon as the "Colombo Statement on Poverty Alleviation". Being a central theme of the 4th BIMSTEC Summit in Kathmandu, poverty alleviation is receiving a lot of attention given the acute problems of poverty in the region. Poverty reduction, especially via skills transfer in terms of quantitative skills, negotiation ability and absorption capacity will help the smaller nations to develop skills that can assist them in alleviating poverty in the region. Skills transfer in terms of education too can serve as a major determinant of poverty alleviation in the BIMSTEC region.

Enhanced Connectivity within India's Northeast and with the ASEAN

The availability of enhanced multilateral funding has made significant contributions to the progress within BIMSTEC. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has ambitious plans of trans-Asia road and rail networks, and the BIMSTEC initiative coupled with the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway agreement can fit well into those plans.

The Government of India is also channelling more resources to improve connectivity in India's Northeast. By 2022 all state capitals in the Northeast except Shillong will be linked by railways to Guwahati. Japanese Official

⁷ Press Trust of India (PTI), April 11, 2018, *Thailand expresses concern over BIMSTEC motor vehicle pact*, Business Standard. URL – https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/thailand-expresses-concern-over-bimstec-motor-vehicle-pact-118041100722_1.html

Development Assistance (ODA) is being utilized to speedup road-building in the region. India's US \$ 8 billion Line of credit to Bangladesh is being utilized to enhance rail, overland and coastal connectivity with Bangladesh. By 2020, nine of the eleven railway links between India and Bangladesh severed in 1965 will be restored.

To Achieve Success, BIMSTEC must pay heed to 4 Key Challenges

The BIMSTEC region is characterized by a diversity in geography, heterogeneity in the levels of economic development, and asymmetry in physical and economic size. For the BIMSTEC initiative to achieve success, it must adopt the ASEAN motto of proceeding 'at a pace comfortable to all.'

Four challenges are currently plaguing the regional initiative. First, a lack of media coverage and public awareness about the grouping acts as a major impediment for the growth of BIMSTEC. Unlike SAARC, the initiative has not become a household name, and there is a need to incorporate information about BIMSTEC in the school and university curriculums.

Second, BIMSTEC's top-down approach has been problematic. For the initiative to become an enabler of regional cooperation, it will have to evolve as an organization that works through a bottoms-up rather than a top-down approach. BIMSTEC lags behind the ASEAN and other regional organizations with regard to people to people contact and hence, it must work towards adopting a people-centric approach.

Third, there is a lack of focus in the initiative. Through the projects that BIMSTEC has undertaken over the years, the areas of cooperation have been broadened but there is a lack of closure. Hence, the organization needs to focus on fewer priority areas for the purpose of better implementation. Further, it also needs to undertake projects that are economically feasible and result-driven.

Finally, the so-called 'national interests' of member countries stand in the way of progress for the organization. Even though there are plenty of opportunities in the region, the fiscal checks and balances mean that a reprioritisation of sectors is required for a more efficient implementation. Hence, the member states need to build on the regional synergies and work towards utilizing the available resources in a more optimal manner. This would help build a stronger and a more dynamic BIMSTEC.

Conferences on Advancing BIMSTEC Regional Cooperation

Design of the Conferences

A total of three conferences were organized by the Delhi Policy Group in Delhi, Yangon and Colombo from April to August, 2018. The discussions in each conference were divided into four thematic areas:

1. Trade and Economic Integration

[The session dealt with Non-Tariff Barriers/ Measures, Customs and Electronic Data Interchange, Banking, Border Trade and Border Infrastructure, BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement, Potential impact of trade facilitation and the impact of the BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement on female livelihood issues, Encouraging women entrepreneurship etc.]

2. Transit and Multimodal Connectivity (Roadways, Waterways, Railways and Aviation)

[The session dealt with Ports and Shipping, Aviation, Waterways, Roads, Railways, Coastal Shipping, Container Transportation, impact of improved transportation network in the livelihood of women in rural/urban communities etc.]

3. Energy, Water, Environment, Climate Change and Other Issues

[The session dealt with Energy, Agriculture, Fisheries, Environment and Natural Disaster Management, Climate Change, integration of gender into climate change policies and programmes in order to ensure sustainable development etc.]

4. People to People Connectivity through Multi-sectoral Engagement

[The session dealt with people to people contact, education, cultural cooperation, poverty alleviation, tourism and public health, cross border human trafficking issues etc.]

Discussions in the three conferences focused on outlining a two-year Plan of Action for each of the four thematic areas. Further, a two-year action plan was also outlined for a thematic area which focused on 'Advancing Gender Issues' in the BIMSTEC region. These Action Plans outlined the implementation process as well as the likely challenges. The idea was to get three distinct and unique national perspectives from participants in the three capitals.

On Day 1, experts from BIMSTEC countries presented papers. The topic of each paper was decided based on their area of expertise and the thematic area of the session they presented the paper on.

On Day 2, the conference design was in a workshop format focusing on brainstorming sessions, where participants were divided into Groups based on their expertise. Each Group was led by a Group Mentor. Participants engaged themselves in developing concrete two-year Plans of Action for each of the five thematic areas discussed at the conferences.

How much Traction did the Conferences get at the Track 1 level?

The three BIMSTEC Conferences had participation from scholars, experts, civil society representatives, media persons and businesspersons amongst others. The conferences were also able to attract participation from think-tanks and other institutions in a range of geographical locations such as Delhi, Bangkok, Colombo, Dhaka, Kathmandu, Thimpu and Yangon.

Though the conferences were intended as a Track 2 exercise, they received good traction at the Track 1 level. For example, the recently concluded Colombo Conference was addressed by Dr. Indrajit Coomaraswamy, the Governor of Sri Lanka's Central Bank, Mrs. Grace Asirwatham, the State Secretary in the Foreign Office and Ambassador Sumith Nakandala, former Secretary-General of BIMSTEC. Similarly, official dignitaries addressing the Yangon Conference included the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Dr. Khin Zaw and Deputy Director General in the Ministry of Commerce, Mrs. Naw Mutakapaw. Further, the heads of partner think-tanks, MISIS and CESD also addressed the gathering and participated in the sessions.

The Delhi Conference was addressed by the heads of missions of Thailand, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, apart from the serving Secretary-General of BIMSTEC His Excellency M. Shahidul Islam. India's Heads of Mission in Colombo and Yangon addressed the Conferences held in the two capitals respectively. The Joint Secretary (BIMSTEC & SAARC) in the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, Shri Piyush Srivastava delivered Special Addresses at the inaugural sessions of the conferences in Delhi and Yangon. At the Track 2 level, close to 130 scholars, experts, media persons and civil society representatives from more than 55 think tanks, universities and other institutions in BIMSTEC member countries participated in the conferences held in Delhi, Yangon and Colombo.



The serving Secretary General of BIMSTEC, H.E. M. Shahidul Islam (left) delivering the valedictory address at the DPG Regional Conference on Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation held in New Delhi on April 26-27, 2018. Source: Delhi Policy Group

What have the DPG BIMSTEC Conferences achieved so far?

The BIMSTEC conferences have conducted an in-depth examination of the present situation and the future potential for regional cooperation in each of the five thematic areas of Trade and Economic Integration; Transit and Multimodal Connectivity; Energy, Water, Environment, Climate Change and other issues; People to People Connectivity through Multi-sectoral Engagement; and Advancing Gender Issues in BIMSTEC Regional Cooperation.

The three conferences have, more importantly, focused on outlining and fleshing out details of a two-year action plan in each of the five thematic areas outlined earlier. Each two-year action plan identifies three priority areas and lists out the implementation process and the likely challenges.

The BIMSTEC Action Plans Developed at the Conferences

The following table summarizes the three two-year Plans of Action along with the priorities, implementation processes and challenges developed in the three conferences held in New Delhi, Yangon and Colombo:

Table 1: SUMMARY OF PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED ON THE BIMSTEC PLANS OF ACTION IN DELHI, YANGON AND COLOMBO

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
TRADE AND ECONOMIC ISSUES			
DELHI ACTION PLAN	The Free Trade Agreement (FTA).	It was recommended that the active role and involvement of the BIMSTEC Secretariat is necessary for way forward.	Inflexibility in approach. Capacity for trade negotiations between the BIMSTEC countries is constrained. Problems in the movement of some aspects of FTA negotiations.
	Value Chain Integration.	Establish a working group to ensure implementation of the action plan in the following year. Ensure participation and representation of the private sector. Request ADB for financial and technical assistance. Thailand can take the lead for implementation.	Inability of member countries to adopt the process. Private sector may not put in the kind of investment that is needed for the growth of value chain integration.
	Technology from India	India can take the lead for implementation.	The BIMSTEC member nations do not have the necessary digital infrastructure needed for implementation. Ensuring cyber security still remains a challenge in the region. There are technical and regulatory issues.

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
YANGON ACTION PLAN	Finalize the BIMSTEC FTA.	Expedite work on TNC by forming dedicated subcommittees for NTMs and Services.	<p>Convincing all the countries on the merits of Framework T&I Agreements that could pave the way for specific BTAs and BITs.</p> <p>Translate the political will into bureaucratic 'buy-in and technical operationalization'.</p>
	Design the BIMSTEC Investment Protocol.	<p>Form a negotiating subcommittee dedicated to the Investment sector.</p> <p>Spread greater public awareness about BIMSTEC, through Summits and Ministerial meetings.</p>	<p>Convincing all the countries on the merits of Framework T&I Agreements that could pave the way for specific BTAs and BITs.</p> <p>Translate the political will into bureaucratic 'buy-in and technical operationalization'.</p> <p>Scarcity and unavailability of bureaucratic capital.</p>
	Strengthen the BIMSTEC Secretariat.	<p>Endorsement of the action plan in BIMSTEC Summit held yearly.</p> <p>Formal engagement of the Secretariat with donors (MDBs, bilateralism) for TA & projects.</p> <p>Encourage private-sector engagement and PS-friendly website/mobile apps with substantive content.</p>	<p>Convincing all the countries on the merits of Framework T&I Agreements that could pave the way for specific BTAs and BITs.</p> <p>Translate the political will into bureaucratic 'buy-in and technical operationalization'.</p> <p>Scarcity and unavailability of bureaucratic capital.</p> <p>There exists a diverse pool of 'needs and interests' of member states which is a challenge for regional integration.</p>

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
COLOMBO ACTION PLAN	Comprehensive FTA/ Economic Relationship.	Streamlining MRA's in goods and services. Signing an Investment Treaty. Raising public awareness about BIMSTEC.	Capacity of local populations of BIMSTEC countries to further these plans is a challenge. Inadequate and difficult funding of studies and projects is an impediment to growth and advancement. Perception and branding may not be up to the mark.
	Value Chain Integration.	Rules of origin need to be analysed and implemented. Collaborative research needs to be conducted by the BIMSTEC member states. BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce needs to be re-energized. India needs to demonstrate signs of leading the process.	Convincing business authorities in the BIMSTEC region can pose to be an issue. Bringing together the governments of all BIMSTEC member states on board can be difficult. Technical capacity of the BIMSTEC region to undertake the plan is questionable.
	Trade Facilitation Measures.	Finalise the draft Trade Facilitation Agreement. Formulate a BIMSTEC-wide VISA. BIMSTEC Secretariat needs to enhance its overall role in the region. Completion of trade facilitation in the next 12-18 months needs to be ensured.	The difficulty to identify a common SAARC Visa was identified as a challenge. Capacity of the staff is limited. Negotiation skills need to be enhanced to reach a consensus.
TRANSIT AND MULTIMODAL CONNECTIVITY			
DELHI ACTION PLAN	Completion of the Connectivity Master Plan	The stakeholders need to be consulted before implementation. Building synergy between BIMSTEC Master Plan and National Connectivity Masterplan/ Infrastructure Strategy is necessary. Synergizing with the infrastructure developments plans of multilateral agencies like ADB, World Bank and national funding agencies is recommended.	Differences amongst member states in prioritization of areas in implementation of the master plan. Identifying the right resources is problematic. Problematic political ownership of the initiative.

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
		<p>Need to set up an intergovernmental group to finalize the master plan.</p> <p>All member states need to approve the scheme.</p>	<p>Balancing out ecological concerns of member states might prove difficult.</p> <p>Convincing the stakeholders of future potential may prove challenging.</p>
	<p>Building upon the BBIN MVA and Completion of the BIMSTEC MVA – Passenger and Cargo</p>	<p>Immediate completion of the negotiations and finalising the protocols for passenger and cargo.</p> <p>Incorporating flexibility for countries to participate in different protocols: : Cargo, Scheduled passenger and Unscheduled passenger</p> <p>Conducting trial runs in the BIMSTEC corridors to ensure their proper functioning.</p> <p>Synergising National legislation to dovetail with international connectivity legislation.</p> <p>Strengthening the customs and border agencies in the BIMSTEC region.</p> <p>Adopt the ‘Best Operational Practices’ practiced across the world in the region.</p> <p>Ensuring ‘capacity building’ for facilitating connectivity in the region.</p>	<p>The ratification process of the MVA is time-consuming.</p> <p>It is difficult to interlink the customs and immigration electronic systems of the BIMSTEC member states.</p> <p>There is a lack of capacity in BIMSTEC border areas pertaining to road-transport and police personnel.</p> <p>Language barrier and different signage systems in the member countries may make implementation of the MVA difficult.</p> <p>Differences in the driving systems (left and right) in the BIMSTEC countries will make implementation of the MVA complicated.</p>
	<p>Promotion of Coastal Shipping in the Bay of Bengal</p>	<p>Develop coastal shipping arrangements in the Bay of Bengal region.</p> <p>Starting regular shipping services in the region is necessary. (Viability gap funding)</p> <p>Designing a few rules and regulations to facilitate the shipping services is recommended. (Member states could use the India-Bangladesh bilateral agreement as a possible template).</p>	<p>There is a lack of funding for starting and sustaining the service in the short term.</p> <p>Concluding the negotiations at the earliest seems a cumbersome task.</p> <p>Ratification of the agreement might prove difficult.</p>

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
		<p>It was suggested that to further this goal, BIMSTEC nations can reach out to Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, the other nations surrounding the Bay of Bengal.</p> <p>Outreach to the logistics community to help develop shipping related services is a lucrative option.</p> <p>Synergising the waterway, roads and rail transportation can also help the agenda.</p>	<p>Finding effective solutions for issues such as insurance will be complicated.</p>
	Connectivity Facilitation relating to trade and people	<p>Concluding the negotiations of the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement at the earliest was recommended.</p> <p>Interconnection of customs systems of members states is necessary.</p> <p>Interconnection of immigration systems of members states is necessary.</p> <p>Signing and ratification of the TIR is important and it was suggested that India should take the lead in initiating the same.</p> <p>Strengthening the customs and border agencies of BIMSTEC nations was recommended.</p>	<p>Funding and deploying resources to implement this process might be cumbersome.</p> <p>Cultural and language issues might hinder the implementation.</p>
YANGON ACTION PLAN	Direct Shipping among BIMSTEC Countries.	<p>Come up with strategies to attract shipping lines to provide direct service in the BIMSTEC region.</p> <p>Build a Network of BIMSTEC shipping companies to implement the action plan.</p> <p>Regular Dialogues need to be held between Shipping companies in the region.</p> <p>Completion of Dawei and other ports in the region.</p>	<p>There are insufficient port facilities in Myanmar to establish direct shipping links.</p> <p>This process may face resistance from existing cartels to form a network of shipping links.</p> <p>There is a lack of adequate finance for infrastructure.</p>

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
	<p>Completing missing road links between Thailand-Myanmar-India.</p>	<p>BIMSTEC nations need to hold regular meetings of the working groups.</p> <p>Member states need to establish regular interaction between contractors, agents and port agencies to resolve spare part issues.</p>	<p>Road linkages between these nations are difficult to establish due to the construction-unfriendly geographical terrain.</p> <p>Repairing construction equipment's is difficult since spare parts have to be imported and that takes a long time, thereby holding up work.</p> <p>Payment clauses for contractors who engage with the work related to the trilateral highway is not sufficiently friendly.</p>
	<p>Connecting the BIMSTEC region through railways.</p>	<p>The action plan can be implemented by forming an expert group to compile a quick report on rail connectivity projects and priorities.</p> <p>The BIMSTEC Secretariat should convene a meeting of member countries to discuss priorities in rail development.</p> <p>High Level Political dialogues between member states should be held to agree on priority projects.</p> <p>In the long run, BIMSTEC members need to involve media to highlight the benefits of connectivity in the BIMSTEC region.</p> <p>Pilot trial runs of railways in the region should be the immediate goal.</p>	<p>There may be a difficulty in funding feasibility studies and financing for implementation of the action plan.</p> <p>There may be a disagreement on priority issues among member countries.</p> <p>There is no consensus among countries on who is going to be the lead country in undertaking the implementation process.</p>
	<p>More passenger airlinks among the BIMSTEC countries are needed.</p>	<p>Convene regular meetings of airlines operating in the BIMSTEC region.</p> <p>Allowing 5th freedom to BIMSTEC airlines. E.g. Thai airways can fly from Bangkok to Guwahati and then on to Bodhgaya.</p>	<p>Inter-operability between member countries may prove to be an issue.</p> <p>Resistance from existing cartels.</p> <p>Fleet capacity of the airlines.</p>

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
COLOMBO ACTION PLAN	BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement	<p>Insurance schemes need to be set up.</p> <p>National treatment of vessels needs to be ensured.</p> <p>Standards have to be set for shipping in the region.</p> <p>Incentives need to be given to the shipping companies like reduced berthing charges.</p> <p>Reduced duties/ Bunker fuel needs to be extended to shipping companies.</p> <p>Pilot Services need to be established. Example: Sagarmala.</p>	<p>Viable business in terms of volumes may prove difficult.</p> <p>Appropriate vessel deployment can be an issue.</p> <p>Last mile connectivity may not be possible.</p>
	BIMSTEC Motor Vehicles Agreement	<p>Pilot Services/ Inland clearances need to be established.</p> <p>Common Bond and common transit rules need to be established region-wide.</p> <p>Development of integrated customs posts-pick one or two locations as best practice demonstration venues</p> <p>Flexibility of rules regarding trucks, trailers and changing of drivers needs to be ensured.</p>	<p>Mindsets of people and the current regulations in place may pose a challenge.</p> <p>Inadequate Infrastructure in the region is an issue.</p> <p>Security standards are not up to the mark. Conflict zone management needs to be done.</p>
	BIMSTEC Trade Facilitation Agreement	<p>Focus on disciplines most relevant to the region.</p> <p>Common Bonds need to be established.</p> <p>Common Customs techniques need to be formally accepted by the law in individual BIMSTEC countries.</p> <p>Developing common declaration documents to facilitate easy EEZ declarations.</p> <p>Cooperation between customs and import sharing to help mitigate risks in the region.</p>	<p>Electronic Signature acceptance may prove to be a problem at customs of other countries.</p> <p>Acceptance of each other's documents will not be easy.</p> <p>Legal issues of liability are of concern.</p> <p>Legal Eco-system for MMBL may prove to be a challenge.</p>

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
ENERGY AND WATER ISSUES			
DELHI ACTION PLAN	Integrating Coastal Zones to River Systems (IRCZM).	<p>Develop a long-term investment plan with the assistance of multi-lateral agencies and other donors.</p> <p>Convene a BIMSTEC Consortium of knowledge institutions.</p> <p>Conduct capacity assessment of disaster agencies in the BIMSTEC region. Example: War Games.</p>	There exists no regional institution that can lead the implementation process.
	Leverage diversity of BIMSTEC Energy sources.	<p>To implement the action plan, it was recommended that the 'Energy Charter' agenda is included in the agenda for the BIMSTEC Kathmandu Summit, 2018.</p> <p>It was suggested to integrate the Climate Commitments with energy mix generation in the region.</p>	<p>Harmonizing similar standards in all member countries is a problem.</p> <p>There exists a large financial gap in theory and execution of this agenda.</p>
	Inducting a Water Transport System in the Connectivity Master Plan.	<p>Convene the BIMSTEC Waterways meeting to chart out the course of action.</p> <p>Integrate the National Investment Plans of the BIMSTEC member states in a manner suitable for the implementation of the agenda.</p>	Asymmetric Institutional capacities in BIMSTEC Countries is a challenge
YANGON ACTION PLAN	Green, Sustainable, Climate Resilient Projects and Infrastructure for BIMSTEC Region.	<p>Form and facilitate the relevant expert groups task force.</p> <p>Involve and engage stakeholders with a transparent process.</p> <p>BIMSTEC Secretariat should build & facilitate a network of institutions.</p>	<p>Short term profit centric attitudes ignoring local & ecological interests is a challenge to achieve the desired results.</p> <p>Lack of coordination and integration among member states.</p> <p>Limited availability and restricted access to data & knowledge sources.</p>
	Enhanced data, knowledge, wisdom and best practices.	<p>Build a network of relevant data institutions.</p> <p>Access other data sources beyond BIMSTEC.</p> <p>Data & knowledge training /workshop among member states.</p>	<p>Reservation & concern about data-sharing between member states.</p> <p>Quality of data may not be good.</p> <p>Comparability and compatibility of data may prove challenging.</p>

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
	BIMSTEC Strategic inclusive partnership to mobilize global investment & funding.	BIMSTEC Secretariat should take steps to implement & follow up the action plans. BIMSTEC to develop a mechanism of accountability for appropriate utilization of funds.	Good quality of projects (meeting the guidelines) may be challenging. To meet criteria like sustainability, equitability etc, may be difficult.
COLOMBO ACTION PLAN	Integrated Optimum Water Resource Utilization Plan	Form and facilitate relevant institutions to bring different stakeholders together, including individual governments. Involvement should be undertaken at the bottom level to ensure a bottom-up approach. Expert analysis should be conducted at a BIMSTEC-wide level.	Linking optimum water utilization plan to the regional economy, energy, climate change and water trade was identified as a challenge. Inadequate funding and lack of methods to ensure a speedy execution was also identified as a challenge. Synergies between individual countries also poses a challenge.
	Combating Climate Change	Build a joint environmental committee and inter-governmental institutions. Increase public awareness in the BIMSTEC region. Ensure natural capital and social capital protection in the region.	Diversity in terrain across the region is a likely challenge. Social challenges are prevalent across the region. Livelihood, security and gender issues pose a challenge in combating climate change.
	Energy Trade Facilitation	Regional Grid Master Plan should be finalised. Entity for energy banking needs to be set-up. Peak-price mechanism across the border should be established.	Maintaining of carbon neutrality is a challenge for the region. Grid synchronisation may be difficult. Infrastructure is inadequate to support energy trade facilitation.

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
PEOPLE TO PEOPLE CONNECTIVITY			
DELHI ACTION PLAN	Cooperation in the Education Sector	<p>Begin programs dedicated to student exchanges, inter-country internships, working holidays, youth festivals etc.</p> <p>Establish distance learning programs and short-term training programs in different universities of the region.</p> <p>Promote intra-regional sports and cultural events at school, college and university level.</p>	<p>The Secretariat has limited capacity to fund the programs.</p> <p>There are differences in national education programs.</p> <p>Identification of stakeholders and beneficiaries will prove challenging.</p>
	Promotion of Tourism	<p>Launch of special programs, such as Buddhist Circuits, eco- tourism, river cruises, war tourism, scuba diving, adventure tourism etc.</p> <p>The concept of 'Twinning of Cities' was also suggested.</p>	<p>It might prove difficult to involve the private sector.</p> <p>Improving connectivity for passenger travel is a problem.</p> <p>Liberalization of visas and border passes might be an issue.</p> <p>Illegal migration and trafficking of women and children in the region creates an atmosphere of distrust.</p> <p>Different perceptions in the region can create issues.</p>
	Cultural Cooperation and Exchange	<p>We need to establish BIMSTEC Cultural Festivals and participate in each other's major festivals.</p> <p>Special New Year Festival of the BIMSTEC region should be celebrated in April every year.</p> <p>Launch studies on identifying common cultural roots for launching cooperation initiatives.</p> <p>Promotion of Yoga in the BIMSTEC region.</p> <p>CSO's Interactions in the region.</p> <p>Promotion of traditional gifts within the region.</p>	<p>Lack of infrastructure in tourist destinations is problematic.</p> <p>Financial funding for the process will be a major challenge.</p> <p>Identification of stakeholders and beneficiaries will be challenging.</p>

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
YANGON ACTION PLAN	Tourism	<p>A group of BIMSTEC Tour Operators should be established in the region.</p> <p>Branding and Marketing Support should be extended to tourist circuits.</p> <p>Database Creation on potential tourists should be done.</p> <p>Tourist friendly port infrastructure should be built.</p> <p>Festivals and Seminars which highlight the intangible and tangible cultural heritage of the rivers and the Bay of Bengal should be celebrated with a sense of togetherness.</p> <p>We should add a film and food section to each festival.</p>	<p>Visa on arrival is still inefficiently implemented in a few places.</p> <p>High airfare and bad fare linkages will deter tourism.</p> <p>Financing and Banking challenges in BIMSTEC countries.</p> <p>Instable Political conditions in some BIMSTEC countries.</p>
	Media	<p>Media Coordinator in BIMSTEC Secretariat needs to be appointed to carry out the plan.</p> <p>Exchange Programs with media celebrities and resource persons needs to be organised from time-to-time.</p> <p>Joint workshops amongst the BIMSTEC member states need to be established.</p> <p>A push should be given to the social media strategies, to cover BIMSTEC regional developments.</p> <p>Film shooting locations should be identified in the region and promoted.</p> <p>Conservation and preservation of heritage sites in the region.</p>	<p>The capacity of the BIMSTEC Secretariat is still unsatisfactory.</p> <p>Connectivity among BIMSTEC states is still a challenge.</p> <p>Banking and Funding of the projects are still problematic in the region.</p> <p>Perceptions related to Political stability in the region.</p> <p>Standards of quality may differ from country to country.</p>
	Education	<p>Vice Chancellors/ Rector Forums and BIMSTEC Education Ministers Conferences should be organised time-to-time.</p> <p>BIMSTEC Joint Educational Curriculum Development should be developed in coordination with universities across the region.</p> <p>BIMSTEC Scholarships should be offered to students across the region.</p> <p>BIMSTEC Eminent Experts group in Education should be established to promote educational quality throughout the region.</p>	<p>The capacity of the BIMSTEC Secretariat is still unsatisfactory.</p> <p>Connectivity among BIMSTEC states is still a challenge.</p> <p>Banking and Funding of the projects are still problematic in the region.</p> <p>Perceptions related to Political stability in the region.</p>

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
COLOMBO ACTION PLAN	Tourism	<p>Identify and Commission Universities/Think-Tanks to do research projects on history and culture in the region.</p> <p>Produce Documentaries on the BIMSTEC region.</p> <p>Use BIMSTEC website/ travel- trade website to promote goodwill and awareness of the region.</p> <p>Fiscal incentives should be given to private sector to facilitate tourism.</p>	<p>Getting cooperation of rival groups and lobbyists is a major challenge.</p> <p>Getting individual governments to facilitate movement is a challenge (example: ferry operation between India and Sri Lanka).</p> <p>Inadequate Financing and Banking challenges in BIMSTEC countries.</p>
	Trade in Local Products	<p>Persuade Chamber of Commerce to organize exhibitions/ workshops.</p> <p>Use Social media and e-commerce platforms to advertise products.</p> <p>Facilitate workshops for skill upgradation.</p> <p>Provide tax incentives for introducing new technology.</p>	<p>Persuading Chamber of Commerce to focus on local products and micro-trade is a challenge.</p> <p>Language barrier in the region. (Use social media platforms in local languages)</p> <p>Finding funding for organizing workshops.</p> <p>Persuading governments to give fiscal incentives.</p>
	Youth Networks through education	<p>Conduct studies on potential modes of student exchanges.</p> <p>Organize workshops with universities for both, teachers and students.</p> <p>Identify and work on pilot projects for wider implementation after evaluation.</p>	<p>Inadequate availability of finance.</p> <p>Buy-in from the universities.</p> <p>Unavailability of scholarships and grants to facilitate student exchanges.</p> <p>Persuading governments and universities to participate and cooperate.</p>

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
ADVANCING GENDER ISSUES			
DELHI ACTION PLAN	Development of a formal gender framework along the lines of the APEC gender framework	<p>Develop a profile of socioeconomic indicators pertaining to gender for BIMSTEC countries.</p> <p>Culling out gender disaggregated data in the region.</p> <p>Conduct studies on existing frameworks elsewhere in the world that can be used as possible templates in the future.</p>	<p>It might prove difficult to convince stakeholders that a gender framework is necessary.</p> <p>Gender disaggregated data for the region might not be available.</p> <p>Obtaining funding and resources might be challenging.</p>
	Building capacity of experts and institutions working on gender and cross cutting issues – regional / trade / connectivity	<p>Introduce courses on gender studies in universities across the BIMSTEC region.</p> <p>Develop gender-sensitivity training programs in the BIMSTEC countries.</p> <p>Introduce BIMSTEC led symposia, roundtables, workshops, etc. around the theme of trade / trade facilitation, and gender.</p> <p>Encourage media and experts to write regularly about cross-cutting issues and host conferences / workshops / field work on the same.</p>	<p>Appropriate funding and resources might not be available.</p> <p>Universities and schools might be rigid and inelastic in altering curriculums.</p> <p>There might be resistance to include the gender-dimension to the BIMSTEC agenda.</p>
	Promote women-led enterprises in the BIMSTEC countries to engage in cross-border trade	<p>Border areas need to be made more women-friendly in terms of adequate sanitation, lighting, safe transport, healthcare facilities, etc.</p> <p>Increase the visibility of women in border agencies in areas such as customs / immigration / BSF / SSB.</p> <p>Mapping of sectors.</p> <p>Human resource capacity to build awareness on gender sensitivity is necessary.</p> <p>Training women led enterprises on trade procedures and financial literacy in the BIMSTEC region was recommended.</p>	<p>Overcome cultural barriers and lack of awareness and sensitivity towards gender issues.</p> <p>Lack of market information on regional trade (BBIN / BIMSTEC).</p> <p>Need to convince the stakeholders / enterprises of benefits of trading in BIMSTEC region.</p>

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
YANGON ACTION PLAN	BIMSTEC member countries should develop a formal gender framework.	<p>Review APEC gender framework and revamp it to the BIMSTEC context.</p> <p>Model the gender framework for BIMSTEC along the lines of the APEC gender framework.</p> <p>CSO / Think tanks can provide inputs on the gender framework to share with the BIMSTEC Secretariat.</p> <p>BIMSTEC Secretariat can draft the gender framework and share it with the gender experts across BIMSTEC for consultations.</p> <p>Secretariat to pursue UN Women to identify and place a gender experts as a resource person at the Secretariat.</p> <p>BIMSTEC Secretariat will create a gender cell with gender experts from all BIMSTEC countries to make up a "gender working group" with a convener who is based at the Secretariat.</p>	<p>Convincing stakeholders that a gender framework is necessary may prove challenging.</p> <p>Unavailability of gender disaggregated data.</p> <p>Difficulty in getting funding and resources.</p>
	Identifying triggers, and initiating dialogues based on locally generated ideas on the role of gender in improved BIMSTEC cooperation.	<p>BIMSTEC Secretariat Gender Working Group to conceive the dialogues, and then work closely with local partners to conduct them.</p> <p>GWG should also participate in existing dialogues and align with existing discourses on gender wherever possible.</p> <p>Encourage media and experts to write regularly about cross-cutting issues and host conferences / workshops / field work on this.</p>	<p>Unavailability of funding and resources.</p> <p>Gender issues / women's challenges are considered "secondary" and are often side-lined in the development discourse.</p> <p>Gender issues are not always operating in silos and you cannot disassociate from the greater milieu.</p>
	Engaging men in the gender discourse.	<p>Reach out to the influential men in the region to engage and contribute.</p> <p>Identify some male "gender champions" to take forward the issue of gender in BIMSTEC.</p> <p>Identify the triggers that make men interested in engaging in gender.</p> <p>Understand what are the gaps that men do not understand how to engage with.</p>	<p>Recognizing that there is a deep and diverse local context of gender in every BIMSTEC nation is quite challenging.</p> <p>Cultural barriers and lack of awareness and sensitivity towards gender issues.</p> <p>Identifying male champions will be difficult and also, convincing them to participate won't be easy.</p>

	PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	CHALLENGES
COLOMBO ACTION PLAN	Integration of Gender perspective into BIMSTEC trade.	<p>Review Gender certification of products & services with an incentives regime in the region.</p> <p>Identify partners in BIMSTEC countries to conduct the study.</p> <p>Identify a network of institutions (Eg: IIMs) to run regular courses on entrepreneurship for women in individual countries.</p>	<p>Ensuring access to fairly priced credits can be a challenge.</p> <p>Ensuring buy- in from governments and chambers is difficult.</p> <p>Ensuring cultural acceptance of women entrepreneurs may not be easy.</p>
	Ensuring Gender dimensions in disaster management	<p>Set up a working group of BIMSTEC comprising officials & civil society representatives.</p> <p>Study best practices of other countries to evolve a plan/strategy for BIMSTEC.</p> <p>Establish a network of BIMSTEC insurance companies.</p>	<p>Regulatory mechanism for ensuring insurance cover for natural disasters is not in place.</p> <p>Funding support from government & corporate sector is inadequate.</p> <p>Incentivizing insurance companies to insure against natural disasters is difficult.</p>
	Develop a gender framework for BIMSTEC.	<p>Review the APEC gender framework & suitably modify it for BIMSTEC.</p> <p>Undertake a Cost-Benefit analysis of the FTA with a gender dimension.</p> <p>Establish a 'gender working group'.</p>	<p>Convincing stakeholders for need of a gender framework is difficult.</p> <p>Un- availability of gender dis-aggregated data.</p> <p>Inadequate funding & resource availability.</p>

Some Significant Proposals made at the Regional Conferences

Trade and Economic Integration

One significant and recurring proposal made during the three DPG Regional Conferences on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' was the signing a comprehensive BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement by all the member states. The rationale behind the same is that an FTA in goods, services and investment would be a game changer for the BIMSTEC region, facilitating trade and production networks.

Dr. Didar Singh, Senior Fellow, DPG and Former Secretary General, FICCI in his presentation entitled "BIMSTEC: Trade and Economic Integration" proposed promoting trade facilitation to ensure that BIMSTEC member countries enjoy frictionless trade.⁸ He suggested focusing on the development of electronic data interchange and e-commerce; employing a GPS tracking system for monitoring cargo movement and containerization of cargo; revival of BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and the development of inter-governmental Bay of Bengal Investment Fund to support seed money for innovative regional entrepreneurship projects.

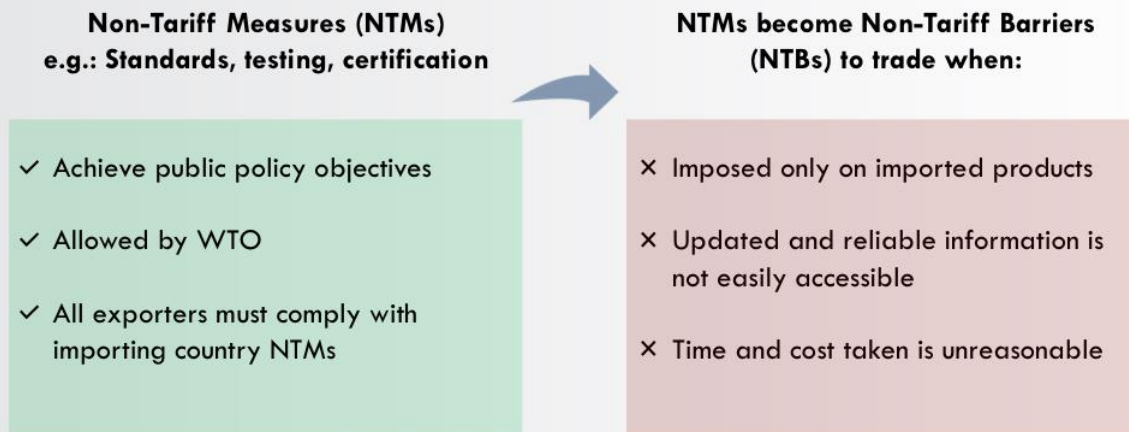
Outlining the differences between Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) and Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs), Ms. Vidya Nathaniel, Economics Team Leader, Verité Research made a presentation on "Addressing Compliance Related NTBs" at the conference in Colombo.⁹ She examined the case study of the food trade between India and Sri Lanka and explained why despite an existing FTA between the two countries, NTBs such as quotas, permit requirements, labelling requirements and cost and time taken to comply with standards and regulations prevent the expansion of trade. NTMs are the measures which the WTO agreement agrees with. Some examples of NTMs are standards, testing, certifications, etc. Thus an exporter needs to comply with the host country's standards and regulations while exporting. However, these NTMs become barriers to trade (NTBs) in certain cases such as when it is only imposed on imported products or when the time taken and the costs incurred become unreasonably long. She concluded by suggesting MRAs (Mutually Recognized Agreements) as the way to counter the problems posed by NTBs.

⁸ Presentation by Dr. Didar Singh, Senior Fellow, DPG and Former FICCI Secretary General at the DPG Regional Conference on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' at New Delhi on April 26-27, 2018.

⁹ Presentation presented by Ms. Vidya Nathaniel, Economics Team Leader, Verité Research at the DPG Regional Conference on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' at Colombo on August 2-3, 2018.

Non-Tariff Measures vs Non-Tariff Barriers

They are not the same



The differences between NTMs and NTBs were succinctly highlighted by Ms. Vidya Nathaniel, Economics Team Leader Verite Research in her presentation. Source: DPG Conference Reports Vol. 3, Issue 4

Dr. Janaka Wijayasiri, Research Fellow, IPS, Colombo in his presentation “Challenges to a BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement: A Sri Lankan Perspective” proposed establishing a single customs window to promote safe and secure trade, particularly at the border region.¹⁰ Further, he laid emphasis on achieving regulatory harmonization and BIMSTEC MRAs which can ensure that services can be traded in the region without hindrances through deeper financial cooperation and mutual recognition of professional qualification.

Dr. Selim Raihan, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Executive Director, SANEM in his paper “BIMSTEC: A Bridge between South Asia and South East Asia” proposed facilitating investment to drive regional integration.¹¹ Investment facilitation should be an upfront priority to build the needed infrastructure in the region. Therefore, to achieve an increased FDI inflow, BIMSTEC countries should reinforce their macro-economic environment towards liberalizing and harmonizing their investment regimes,

¹⁰ Presentation by Dr. Janaka Wijayasiri, Research Fellow, IPS, Colombo at the DPG Regional Conference on ‘Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation’ at Yangon on June 14-15, 2018.

¹¹ Paper presented by Dr. Selim Raihan, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Executive Director, SANEM at the DPG Regional Conference on ‘Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation’ at New Delhi on April 26-27, 2018.

illustrate the potential of conducting smooth business operations and expedite negotiations on the 'Agreement on Services and Investment'.

Dr. Zaw Oo, Executive Director, Centre for Economic and Social Development, Myanmar in his presentation "Enhancing Trade: How Cooperation in Agricultural Production Systems Help all Farmers in BIMSTEC" proposed strengthening Regional Value Chains (RVC).¹² He averred that the successful creation of RVCs depended upon the ability of the region to capitalize on existing resources and opportunities. Since BIMSTEC countries were home to abundant agricultural resources, agricultural cooperation could promote BIMSTEC integration.

Transit and Multimodal Connectivity

Some significant and recurring proposals made during the three conferences were the completion of the India-Thailand-Myanmar Trilateral Highway, which will open up numerous cross-border opportunities for trade and investment, the signing of the BIMSTEC MVA, completion of the Mekong-India Economic Corridor, and negotiating a BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement.

Purushottam Ojha, Former Commerce Secretary, Government of Nepal in his paper "BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement: Issue and Prospects" proposed the development of an arterial road and railway system that could be linked with the national transport systems of all BIMSTEC countries in order to facilitate economic development in the region.¹³ He urged that concrete actions should be taken to link land-locked Nepal and Bhutan to the other member states with the help of hard and soft infrastructure.

Ambassador Sanjay Singh proposed enhancing connectivity infrastructure in the BIMSTEC region to bring into play comparative advantage of different countries in promoting manufacturing in BIMSTEC regional value chains (which contributed 50% of the trade in the region), and for boosting regional benefits in services, tourism, healthcare and education.

Ambassador Rajeet Mitter, Former Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh proposed the exploration of the concept of 'open-skies' as a mechanism to

¹² Presentation by Dr. Zaw Oo, Executive Director, Centre for Economic and Social Development, Myanmar at the DPG Regional Conference on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' at Yangon on June 14-15, 2018.

¹³ Paper presented by Mr. Purushottam Ojha, Former Commerce Secretary, Government of Nepal at the DPG Regional Conference on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' at New Delhi on April 26-27, 2018.

boost air connectivity in the region. BIMSTEC countries could expand air connectivity, particularly to link India's Northeast with Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand. Further, he also recommended the development of a BIMSTEC Agreement on the use of Waterways for trade and transit.

Dr. Pritam Banerjee, Independent Consultant and Former Senior Director – South Asia, Deutsche Post DHL Group in his presentation “Connectivity in the BIMSTEC: Finding Institutional Solutions to Operational Issues” proposed undertaking logistical reforms and initiating protocols like inland clearances, through establishing bonded zones, message exchange between BIMSTEC countries’ customs IT systems and a degree of trust among customs administrations of BIMSTEC member states to ensure seamless movement of sealed containerised cargo between hinterland customs stations.¹⁴ Further, he suggested ratifying the TIR (Transports Internationaux Routiers) Convention which can then function as a customs agreement, essentially facilitating transshipment and movement of goods through an integrated set of documents.

Dr. Prithviraj Nath, Consultant, Asian Development Bank in his presentation “Inland Waterways – Possibilities and Concerns” proposed the need for a comprehensive mapping and preparing a compendium of all projects related to land port development in the region so as to optimize investments, planning and effectiveness.¹⁵

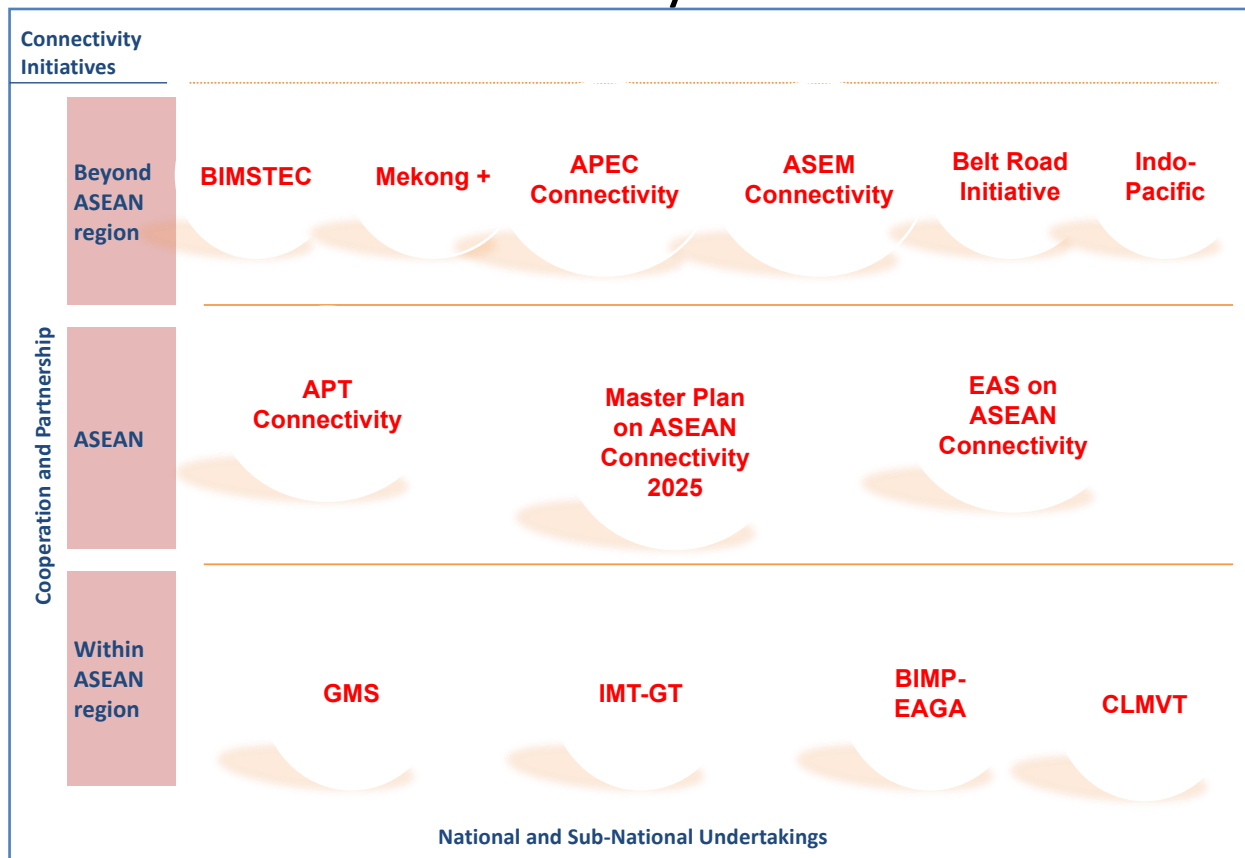
Prof. Prabir De, Professor, Research and Information Systems for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi proposed closer cooperation with the ASEAN, GMS, SAARC and SASEC in boosting BIMSTEC connectivity by conducting regular interactions to review the progress of the on-going projects, identify new projects and mitigate emerging challenges.¹⁶ Further, he recommended to focus on digital connectivity in boosting regional integration and also suggested inducting a few BIMSTEC Observer Countries and engaging them in regional infrastructure projects viz-a-viz financing projects, technical assistance, training and capacity building.

¹⁴ Presentation by Dr. Pritam Banerjee, Independent Consultant and Former Senior Director-South Asia, Corporate Public Policy, Deutsche Post DHL Group at the DPG Regional Conference on ‘Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation’ at Colombo on August 2-3, 2018.

¹⁵ Presentation by Dr. Prithviraj Nath, Consultant, Asian Development Bank at the DPG Regional Conference on ‘Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation’ at Yangon on June 14-15, 2018.

¹⁶ Presentation by Professor Prabir De, Research and Information System for Developing Countries, New Delhi at the DPG Regional Conference on ‘Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation’ at New Delhi on April 26-27, 2018.

Connectivity Initiatives



Prof. Prabir De from RIS highlighted the connectivity initiatives in the region and further proposed closer cooperation of BIMSTEC with ASEAN, GMS, SAARC and SASEC to boost connectivity. Source: DPG Conference Reports Vol. 3, Issue 2.

Energy, Water, Environment, Climate Change and Other Issues

Given the enormous untapped potential for renewable energy at low-cost from hydro-power, solar and wind energy in South Asia, Mr. Arvind Kumar, Advisor, TERI, New Delhi in his presentation on the "Promise and Potential of Cooperation in the Power-Sector in the BIMSTEC" proposed integrating the power-systems of the BIMSTEC countries and also to change the emissions outlook of the region to help reframe the climate pledges under nationally determined contributions (NDCs).¹⁷ Further, he emphasized upon developing a Cross-Border Energy Connection (CBEC) Programme for BIMSTEC.

Dr. Sajjad Zohir, Executive Director, Economic Research Group, Dhaka in his presentation "Accessing Energy Resources in the Region: Need for the right balance between growth, stability and human values" proposed establishing a

¹⁷ Presentation by Mr. Arvind Kumar, Advisor, TERI, New Delhi at the DPG Regional Conference on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' at New Delhi on April 26-27, 2018.

Joint Initiative on Energy Cooperation among the BIMSTEC member states.¹⁸ Further, he suggested that the project designs of energy cooperation should account for spatial distribution of benefits and costs and include appropriate measures to compensate for those displaced.

BIMSTEC's Energy Potential

BIMSTEC's renewable power

Description	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Myanmar	Nepal	Sri Lanka	Thailand
Peak	9000	333	160,00	2,400	1462	2,164	27,346
Installed Capacity	12,780	1,606	307,000	4,422	712	3,963	37,602
Solar Potential	50,000	> 58,000	784,990	>26,900	> 25,000	>6000	22,800
Wind Potential	>4,600	NA	302,251	>33,800	>30,000	>25,000	NA
Hydro Potential	NA	30,000	235,000	>46,000	83,000	NA	15,155

**All figures in MW*

Sources: <http://www.nepalenergyforum.com/bimstec-needs-a-power-tool-heres-why-it-is-time-for-a-green-energy-revolution/>

BIMSTEC's Energy Potential in terms of renewable power capacity was highlighted by Prof. Chandan Mahanta from IIT Guwahati in his presentation in Yangon. Source: DPG Conference Reports Vol. 3, Issue 3.

Prof. Chaw Chaw Shein, Head, Department of International Relations, University of Yangon proposed establishing an Integrated Energy Master Plan of the region's immediate energy needs which will help in stabilizing region-wide energy supply. She also stressed upon building an effective investment environment and minimizing environmental impact.¹⁹

Dr. Mark Smith, Deputy Director General, Research and Development, International Water Management Institute, Colombo recommended building an evidence base to

¹⁸ Presentation by Dr. Sajjad Zohir, Executive Director, Economic Research Group, Dhaka at the DPG Regional Conference on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' at Yangon on June 14-15, 2018.

¹⁹ Presentation by Prof. Chaw Chaw Shein, Head, Department of International Relations, University of Yangon at the DPG Regional Conference on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' at Yangon on June 14-15, 2018.

sustainably manage water and land resources for food security, people's livelihood and the environment.²⁰ Further, he suggested the creation of a 'water-energy-food nexus' via analysing policies based on collaborations, negotiations, and trade-offs.

Ms. Divya Hundlani, Research Associate, LKI, Colombo in her presentation "Strengthening National Capacity for Natural Disaster Management in BIMSTEC" proposed the need for a region-wide long-term, joint, proactive and holistic policy in managing natural disasters.²¹ She recommended pooling resources in capacity building, knowledge and technological transfers, building national level capacity for the national disaster agencies, providing mechanisms for effective coordination with other government agencies, policy coordination at all levels – regional, national and local – to solve 'complex' patterns and implement best practices from the region.

People to People Connectivity through Multi-sectoral Engagement

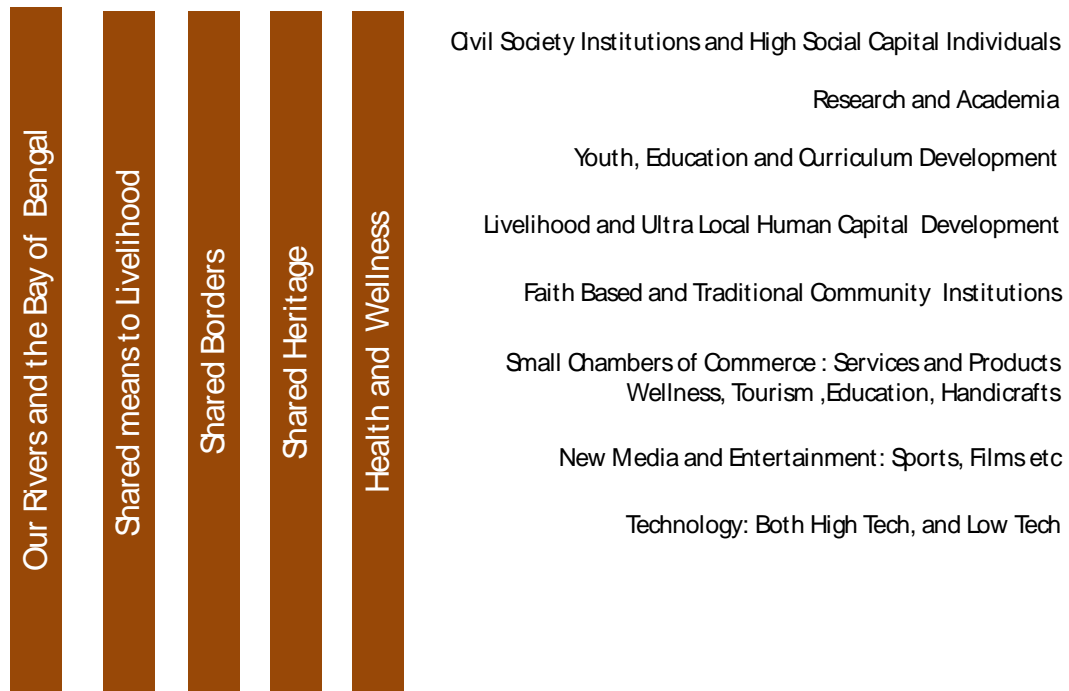
Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta, Executive Director, Asian Confluence, Shillong in his presentation "Mapping Ideas and Institutions: for Enhanced People to People Connectivity" proposed establishing bonds of heart and mind amongst the people in the BIMSTEC region.²² He proposed the creation of positive narratives based on the common and shared history of the region, to establish intra-regional trust and confidence. Further, he also recommended launching programs and initiatives to augment cultural, educational, medical, technological and media interlinkages between the BIMSTEC nations. In the context of BIMSTEC tourism, he suggested that developing the pilgrimage trails like the Nirvana Trail, the Ramayana Express and the Buddhist tourist networks could generate immense interest amongst the people of the region. The Buddhist tourist network has also been a key focus of the 4th BIMSTEC Summit held in Kathmandu on August 30-31, 2018.

²⁰ Presentation by Dr. Mark Smith, Deputy Director General, Research for Development, International Water Management Institute, Colombo at the DPG Regional Conference on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' at Colombo on August 2-3, 2018.

²¹ Presentation by Ms. Divya Hundlani, Research Associate, LKI, Colombo at the DPG Regional Conference on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' at Colombo on August 2-3, 2018.

²² Presentation by Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta, Executive Director, Asian Confluence, Shillong at the DPG Regional Conference on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' at Yangon on June 14-15, 2018.

Mapping Ideas and Institutions



INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta from Asian Confluence mapped ideas and institutions for enhancing People to People Connectivity and presented a useful basket of recommendations for relevant stakeholders. Source: DPG Conference Reports Vol. 3, Issue 3.

Mr. Soe Myint, Editor-in-Chief and Managing Director, Mizzima Media Group, Myanmar in his paper "People to People Connectivity through Multi-sectoral Engagement" proposed developing people-centred connectivity projects and improved physical infrastructure in the BIMSTEC region to enable increased flow of people, services and goods.²³ Recommendations to engage in multi-modal projects such as the Kaladan project and to invest in the physical and human development in the border regions were also made.

Dr. K. Yhome, Senior Fellow, ORF, New Delhi underlined the importance of making BIMSTEC more people-centric rather than it being government-centric. He suggested developing a 'bottom-up' approach to create awareness,

²³ Paper presented by Mr. Soe Myint, Editor-in-Chief and Managing Director, Mizzima Media Group, Myanmar at the DPG Regional Conference on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' at Yangon on June 14-15, 2018.

participation and ownership of BIMSTEC in the local community of the region by launching intra-region education programs, skill-development initiatives, BIMSTEC scholarships, BIMSTEC youth-festivals and region-wide university collaborations. He proposed the establishment of a BIMSTEC University to further the objective of making BIMSTEC more youth-oriented.

Ms. Sampa Kundu, Research Assistant, IDSA, New Delhi in her paper “Creating a ‘Brand’ BIMSTEC and Making it Work” proposed establishing synergy between people to people connectivity and tourism within the BIMSTEC region to create a common identity.²⁴ To augment intra-regional tourism, she suggested that the governments should involve the youth of the region in projects like green tourism, study tours and rural tourism, promote cultural bonding in the region through initiating projects like the East Asian Cultural City, as launched by China, Japan and South Korea and coordinate with various organizations including chambers of commerce, business councils and business forums from various BIMSTEC countries to develop region-wide programs which act as a platform to provide direct or indirect opportunities to young entrepreneurs in trade, investment, joint-venture, employment and research.

Ms. Nisha Arunatilake, Research Director, IPS, Sri Lanka highlighted the role of media and cinema in fostering people to people contacts. Dialogue as well as institutional links between media organisations of India and the neighbouring countries should be established. The goal should be to create an enabling atmosphere that will yield responsible reportage and respect for each other’s concerns, she remarked.

Advancing Gender Issues in the BIMSTEC Region

Dr. Amita Batra, Professor, JNU, New Delhi in her presentation “BIMSTEC-Trade and Economic Integration” proposed a gender-neutral development of trade agreements as a catalyst for gender equality in the BIMSTEC region.²⁵ She suggested mentioning gender dimensions and perspectives, specifically and separately, in the labour and environmental cooperation sections of the Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) to improve women’s access to resources (technology, capital and land) and services.

²⁴ Paper presented by Ms. Sampa Kundu, Research Assistant, IDSA, New Delhi at the DPG Regional Conference on ‘Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation’ at New Delhi on April 26-27, 2018.

²⁵ Presentation by Dr. Amita Batra, Professor, JNU, New Delhi at the DPG Regional Conference on ‘Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation’ at New Delhi on April 26-27, 2018.

Daw Win Myint, National Project Coordinator, International Labor Organization, Myanmar called for an equitable and inclusive pay policy for women in the formal and informal sector, while underlining its importance to raise productivity in the agriculture sector. Further, she proposed inclusion of provisions with benefit to women in FTAs and the establishment of a law enforcement and coordination framework, bringing together the employer and the employee.

Mr. Prithviraj Nath, Consultant, Asian Development Bank in his presentation on “Inland Waterways – Possibilities and Concerns” proposed linking BIMSTEC developmental policies to livelihood creation and gender implications.²⁶ He suggested synergizing the connectivity plan for different modes of transport to empower women and girls from remote regions who are now forming a new entrepreneurial class with better opportunities.

Dr. Khin Maung Lwin, Director (Retd.), Ministry of Health and Sports, Myanmar in his presentation on “Permanent Inundation in BIMSTEC Region” proposed the development of a value-set on gender sensitive measures in the BIMSTEC region.²⁷ To ensure the inclusion of gender dimension in disaster management, he called for an intra-regional government initiative to focus on social issues, security issues, and health issues concerning women vis-à-vis trafficking. His focus was also on reproductive issues, menstrual hygiene, marriage, resettlement, job creation, education and skill development.

Ms. Diya Nag, Head Programs Officer, The Asia Foundation, New Delhi underlined the importance of developing a formal gender framework for the BIMSTEC region. She suggested building the capacity of the BIMSTEC Secretariat to promote women led enterprises in BIMSTEC Countries. Further, she proposed engaging men to create a BIMSTEC Women’s Community that works on gender and cross-cutting issues. Overall, identifying triggers and initiating dialogues based on locally generated ideas on the role of gender equality in improving life standards will yield in improved BIMSTEC cooperation, she remarked.

BIMSTEC Secretariat

After a span of 17 years since the founding of BIMSTEC as a regional organization, it’s permanent Secretariat was established in Dhaka, Bangladesh

²⁶ Presentation by Mr. Prithviraj Nath, Consultant, Asian Development Bank at the DPG Regional Conference on ‘Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation’ at New Delhi on April 26-27, 2018.

²⁷ Presentation by Dr. Khin Maung Lwin, Director (Retd.), Ministry of Health and Sports, Myanmar at the DPG Regional Conference on ‘Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation’ at Yangon on June 14-15, 2018.

in September 2014 to serve the BIMSTEC member states. Speaking at the DPG Regional Conference on 'Advancing BIMSTEC Cooperation' in New Delhi, the Secretary General of the BIMSTEC Secretariat H.E. M. Shahidul Islam said that currently BIMSTEC cooperation is receiving a strong impetus from BIMSTEC member states to make it a stronger, effective and result-oriented organization. He called for specific steps to further rejuvenate the regional grouping through greater political commitment, expeditious negotiations on the BIMSTEC FTA, adequate funding, BIMSTEC special visas and closer people-to-people contacts. He urged the consolidation of the progress made over the last twenty one years and recommended immediate steps to give BIMSTEC a distinct regional flavour.

Conclusions and Key Takeaways

As was to be expected, deliberations at the conferences revealed nuanced differences in approach towards each of the five thematic areas in each of three countries. But taken as basket of priorities they do point to a holistic Plan of Action for the seven BIMSTEC governments. For example, while the Action Plans for trade and regional integration in Delhi, Yangon and Colombo prioritized the finalization of the BIMSTEC FTA, those in Delhi and Colombo focused on establishing value chain integration. The view of experts in Delhi was also in favour of endorsing technology in trade related issues, while the focus of scholars in Yangon was on establishing a BIMSTEC Investment Protocol and a strong BIMSTEC Secretariat. Experts in Colombo stressed more on facilitating trade by introducing trade facilitation measures.

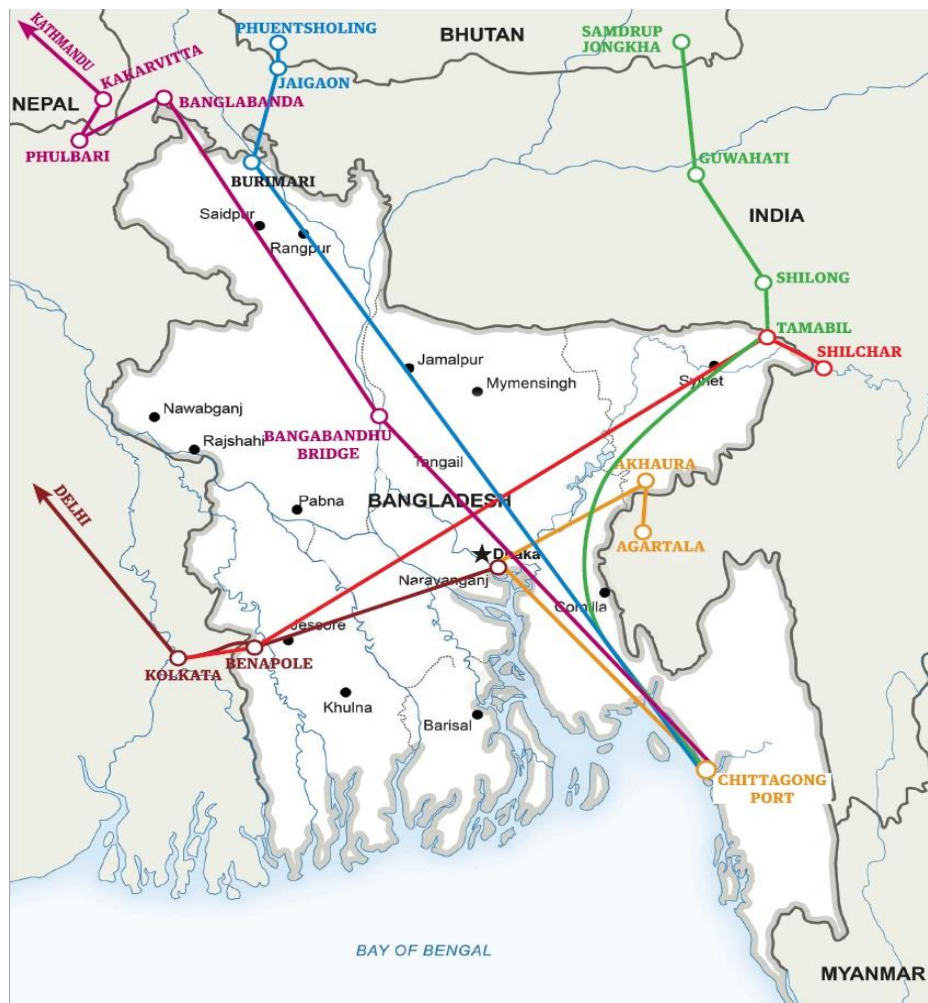
Similarly, on the regional connectivity front, discussions in each of the three capitals stressed upon different priorities. While the Delhi and Colombo conferences stressed upon the need for the conclusion of a BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA), the Yangon conference stressed upon the completion of the missing links in the Thailand-Myanmar-India trilateral highway. The coastal shipping agreement as part of Regional Connectivity was stressed upon in all three countries as Sri Lanka is an island state and both India and Myanmar are also well connected via the sea. Other aspects of connectivity in terms of trade, people to people contacts, railways, passenger air-links, open skies for aviation and trade facilitation also have the potential for increasing cooperation in the region.

At the Yangon conference, the two priority areas that were identified in the Energy sector were developing green, sustainable and climate resilient projects and infrastructure for the BIMSTEC region apart from having a BIMSTEC strategic inclusive partnership to mobilize global investment and funding. In Colombo, DPG discovered that more focus was put on establishing an integrated optimum water resource utilization plan besides combatting climate change and facilitation of energy trade. The priorities identified in the Delhi Conference on the same issue were on integrating coastal zones with river systems and leveraging the diversity of BIMSTEC Energy sources besides including the water transport system in the connectivity master plan.

Enhancing People to People Connectivity through tourism was a major priority in all three Action Plans. Travel and tourism fairs and tourism packages on common themes were mooted to promote tourism traffic between BIMSTEC countries. Another common theme to emerge out of the recommendations of the three conferences was the promotion of youth networks through

education. For the same, the Yangon Conference recommended offering scholarships to the students in the region besides developing joint education curriculums. Other recommendations to enhance people to people ties were through cultural cooperation and exchange (Delhi), media exchanges (Yangon) and trade in local products (Colombo).

Lastly, on the matter of advancing gender issues, discussions in each of the three capitals stressed on developing a gender framework for the BIMSTEC region. The Delhi and Colombo conferences also stressed on promoting women-led enterprises in the BIMSTEC countries in cross-border trade related activities to ensure a gender balance in trade. In the Yangon conference, the focus was primarily on initiating dialogues on gender issues based on locally generated ideas on the role of gender in the society. The experts also suggested engaging men in the gender discourse to identify triggers related to gender issues. In Colombo, the recommendations stressed on ensuring the inclusion of the gender dimensions in natural disasters.



Building on the BBIN model of the Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA), BIMSTEC will look to implement its own MVA in the coming future, which will link all the member states via road. Above is a map depicting the proposed routes of the BBIN MVA. Source: The Third Pole, Bangladesh

Looking Forward

The enhanced interest in BIMSTEC regional cooperation is also manifested in the potential it provides for the way ahead. Despite the differences in opinions, all the member states are looking forward to the completion of the agreement on the BIMSTEC MVA which will improve connectivity and in turn boost trade integration and investment potential across the region. Another proposal under consideration is the Single BIMSTEC Visa similar to Europe's Schengen visa which will provide seamless travel within the seven countries that are a part of the regional grouping.

The potential of producing solar-power is also substantially high in the region. An inter-country power grid encompassing the region would immensely help in increasing power trading and integrating the economies. Out of the BIMSTEC countries, only India and Bangladesh have signed and ratified the Framework Agreement for the International Solar Alliance (ISA). Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar are in the prospective members' list, but are yet to sign the agreement. Considering great potential for solar energy development in the region, it will be mutually beneficial for all members of BIMSTEC to join the ISA.



Delhi Policy Group
Core 5-A, 1st Floor,
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road
New Delhi - 110003
India

www.delhipolicygroup.org