Subregional Office
SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA
ESCAP

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

Side Event at the 81st Session of the Commission

Harnessing Digital Technologies for Sustainable Development in the Bay of Bengal Region

Date: 23 April 2025

Time: 11:15 am – 12.30pm (GMT +7)

Venue: Meeting Room A, United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC), Bangkok

Format: Hybrid

Background and objectives

The Bay of Bengal region countries - Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand are undergoing a period of rapid economic transformation. Digital technologies, e-governance, and innovation play a crucial role in fostering sustainable development and enhancing economic resilience. However, challenges such as digital divide and infrastructure gaps, lack of digital knowledge and skills, cybersecurity risks, and disparities in digital access persist.

This side event, co-organized by ESCAP's Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia in collaboration with the BIMSTEC Secretariat, will serve as a platform for policymakers, experts, and industry leaders to explore strategies for harnessing digitalization to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth in the Bay of Bengal region.

The discussions will focus on: Challenges and opportunities in digital transformation across BIMSTEC member states; digital innovations for inclusive and sustainable development, particularly in education, healthcare, cross-border trade, and financial services; digital solutions for good governance, showcasing effective e-governance models and strategies for overcoming implementation challenges.

The event will bring together policymakers, experts, and stakeholders to share experiences, discuss practical strategies, and identify collaborative actions to harness digital technologies for sustainable development in the Bay of Bengal region.

Expected Outcomes

- Exchange of best practices on digital transformation across BIMSTEC countries
- Identification of policy recommendations for strengthening digital governance
- Enhanced collaboration between BIMSTEC and ESCAP on promoting digital innovation and skills
- Strategies for leveraging technology to bridge digital divides and foster inclusive growth
- Policy recommendations for addressing cybersecurity risks and enhancing digital resilience

Organization: The event will be organized by ESCAP Subregional for South and South-West Asia with collaboration with the BIMSTEC Secretariat.

Participation: The event will be attended by BIMSTEC Secretary-General, UN Residence Coordinators, authorities responsible for digitalization in the BIMSTEC countries, and interested member States representatives and partners.

The panelists will discuss the following questions*:*

1. What are the major challenges in digital transformation across BIMSTEC countries, and how can they be addressed?

2. How can digital governance enhance public service delivery and economic resilience?
3. What role can regional cooperation play in strengthening digital infrastructure and cybersecurity?
4. How can digital innovations empower marginalized communities and promote social inclusion?
5. What policies and regulatory frameworks are needed to enhance cross-border digital trade and e-commerce?

Tentative Programme	
23 April 2025 (GMT +7)	
10:45 – 11:15	**Registration and coffee**
11:15 – 11:30	**Opening Remarks:** *(Moderator: **Mr. Ruhimat Soerakoesoemah**, Head, ESCAP for South-East Asia Office)* • **Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana,** Under Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP • **H.E. Mr. Indra Mani Pandey,** Secretary-General, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) • **H.E. Mr. Anisuzzaman Chowdhury,** Special Assistant (State Minister), Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
11:30 – 11:40	**Keynote Presentation: Digital Innovations for Sustainable Development in the Bay of Bengal Region:** • **Ms. Jamie Brennan,** AI & Technology Policy, Global Government Relations
11:40 – 12:25	**Panel Discussion: the role of digital technologies, e-governance, and innovation in achieving sustainable economic growth and social inclusion in BIMSTEC** *(Moderator:* **Ms. Mikiko Tanaka,** Head, ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office*)* • **H.E. Ms. E.A.S. Wijayanthi Edirisinghe**, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Thailand and Permanent Representative to UNESCAP, Embassy of Sri Lanka, Thailand • **Ms. Kasama Kongsmak**, Executive Vice President, Digital Strategy and Security Promotion Unit, Digital Economy Promotion Agency, Thailand • **Mr. Shombi Sharp**, UN Resident Coordinator, India • **Mr. Aniruddha Mukerji,** Managing Partner & Sr. Director, Tata Consultancy Services (Thailand) Limited • **Dr. A. Saj U. Mendis,** Director of Science, Technology & Innovation and External Relations, BIMSTEC Secretariat **Open Discussion and Q&A**
12:25 – 12:30	**Closing Remarks** • **H.E. Mr. Indra Mani Pandey,** Secretary-General, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) • **Ms. Mikiko Tanaka,** Head, ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office