

Side event on
Enhancing cross border connectivity towards SDGs and shared prosperity
in BBIN – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal

17 May 2023
13:00 – 14:30 (Bangkok Time)

(In person and by invitation only)
Venue: CR-4, Level 1, United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC), Bangkok

Concept Note

Background

The north-eastern region of India assumes strategic geo-political and economic importance as a pivotal land link with bordering South Asian countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. The four countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal constituting this eastern-most sub-region of South Asia, commonly referred to as “BBIN”, share a network of rivers emanating from the majestic peaks of the Himalaya range flowing through the grand Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin and out to the Bay of Bengal. This abundant water source has provided for livelihoods, agriculture, transport and energy for more than 500 million people. In recent years, the effects of global warming and climate change are prominently seen in flooding from sea-level rise on the southern coast, glacial melting and glacial lake outburst floods in the north, and frequent occurrence of extreme weather also resulting in large-scale floods. As the eco-system is connected, natural disasters cross borders with frequent and increasing intensity.

The four countries are members of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), in addition to Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand. On the eastern border of BBIN is Myanmar, through which connections to Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia open, while the Bay of Bengal to the south provides sea links to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. The great potential of connectivity and cooperation within South Asia and with Southeast Asia has attracted significant interest and investment in the BBIN sub-region over the years.

Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal are in a critical developmental phase as they prepare for graduation from Least Developed Country status in 2023 (Bhutan) and 2026 (Bangladesh and Nepal). India’s north-eastern region is lagging behind in SDG indices and is a priority for development within India. The principal challenge of this BBIN sub-region is to overcome its geographic and economic isolation by improving its internal and external connectivity. Cross-border connectivity amongst these countries is also important for accelerating the SDGs for people living in this sub-region.

Cross-border energy trade is being discussed and implemented between BBIN countries through mostly bilateral agreements. A multilateral agreement on cross-border energy trade can bring greater inclusiveness and energy security, and significantly contribute to climate action as it will allow the flow of green energy from the north (Nepal and Bhutan) towards the south (India and Bangladesh). By the same token, optimizing international transit routes via road, rail and waterways would help reduce costs of trade, contribute to sustainable transport and trade, diversify trade and economic opportunities, and connect BBIN countries to regional and global value chains.

Presentations will be made by ESCAP to share findings of a recent study on BBIN connectivity opportunities and relevant regional experiences. Discussions will follow among participating member States and partners with a view to strategize ways to enhance subregional connectivity and cooperation in transport and energy, and how ESCAP in collaboration with BIMSTEC and other international partners can contribute to this process.

Objectives

- 1) Identify priority “early harvest” opportunities that BBIN countries can work together to capitalize on past and ongoing investments and optimize cross-border connectivity towards SDGs; and
- 2) Recommend way forward of collaborative actions and possible areas of ESCAP support in collaboration with BIMSTEC and other partners.

Participants

1. Permanent Representatives to ESCAP and Ambassadors of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal
2. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand (Chair of BIMSTEC)
3. BIMSTEC Secretary-General
4. Partner organizations and think tanks
5. ESCAP Executive Secretary, Energy Division, Transport Division, South and South-West Asia Sub-regional Office

Organization

- This meeting will be held in English.

Enhancing cross border connectivity towards SDGs and shared prosperity in BBIN

Programme

Wednesday, 17 May 2023 (13:00 – 14:30 hrs)	
CR-4, Level 1, United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC), Bangkok	
13:00 – 13:10	Tea/coffee outside CR-4
13:15–13:25	<p>Moderator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head, ESCAP South and South-West Asia Sub-regional Office <p>Opening remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Mr. Tenzin Lekphell, Secretary-General, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) • Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP
13:25–13:40	<p>Presentations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Early harvest opportunities for enhanced connectivity in transport and energy findings from ESCAP study” - Mr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Deputy Head, ESCAP South and South-West Asia Sub-regional Office • “Sharing regional experiences in transport and energy connectivity” - Ms. Azhar Jaimurzina Ducrest, Chief, Transport Division, ESCAP - Mr. Matthew David Wittenstein, Chief, Energy Division, ESCAP
13:40-14:05	<p>Interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Mr. Mohammed Abdul Hye, Permanent Representative to UNESCAP and Ambassador of Bangladesh • H.E. Mr. Kinzang Dorji, Permanent Representative to UNESCAP and Ambassador of Bhutan • H.E. Mr. Nagesh Singh, Permanent Representative to UNESCAP and Ambassador of India • H.E. Mr. Ganesh Prasad Dhakal, Permanent Representative to UNESCAP and Ambassador of Nepal • Mr. Cherdchai Chaivaivid, DG Department of International Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand
14:05-14:25	Open Discussion
14:25–14:30	<p>Concluding remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Mr. Tenzin Lekphell, Secretary-General, Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation • Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head, ESCAP South and South-West Asia Sub-regional Office