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Second Meeting of the

# TRACK 1.5 BIMSTEC SECURITY DIALOGUE FORUM



30-31 July 2019  
Dhaka, Bangladesh



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Participants of the Forum with the Chief Guest Major Genarel Tarique Ahmed Siddique, rcds, psc (retd)







# Introduction

“Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum” is one of the key efforts of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral and Technical Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC’s) security cooperation venture. This forum provides a unique platform for the policy makers and academics to come together and discuss the security challenges facing the Bay of Bengal region. The forum is crucial as it builds a bridge between track-I and track-II stakeholders and provides inputs to be discussed in the higher-level meetings of BIMSTEC.

During the BIMSTEC National Security Adviser/Chiefs first meeting held in New Delhi, India on 21 March 2017, decision was taken to commence a Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum. Accordingly, the first meeting of Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum was organized at IDSA, New Delhi, India on 22 September 2017. In continuation of the process, the second meeting of Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security





Dialogue Forum has been organized by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) on 30-31 July 2019 at BISS auditorium.

The two-day meeting of the Forum commenced with an Inaugural Session wherein **Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique, rcds, psc (retd)**, Security Affairs Adviser to the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh was present as the Chief Guest. There were four working sessions: working session I focused on 'Threat of Terrorism and Violent Extremism, and Responses' by BIMSTEC Countries; working session II on 'Maritime Security (Capacity Building, Maritime Connectivity, etc.)'; working session III on 'Non-Traditional Security Threats with Emphasis on Cyber Security and Transnational Crimes (Illicit Trade and Trafficking in Arms, Narcotics Drugs Smuggling, Human Trafficking, etc.)'; and working session IV on 'Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR)'. Eighteen foreign delegates (three from each country) from Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand and seven speakers from Bangladesh made presentations during the four working sessions. There were also designated discussants for each session, who were local experts, and they put forward their comments and remarks following country presentations on specific security concerns. Each session was followed by an open session where participants deliberated on various security concerns related to the theme of the session. Apart from the inaugural session, participation in the working sessions were limited to country delegates and designated local experts only.





# Inaugural Session

Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc, Director General, BISS, Chaired the Inaugural Session and delivered the welcome address. Ambassador M Shahidul Islam, Secretary General of BIMSTEC delivered the introductory remarks. Mr Kamrul Ahsan, Secretary-Bilateral (Europe, Africa & Americas) and Consul, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh also delivered his remarks in the Inaugural Session. Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique, rcds, psc (retd), Security Affairs Adviser to the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, rendered his address as the Chief Guest. An open discussion session followed, where questions were asked and comments were made from the audience. High-level military officials, scholars, academia, officials from law enforcement agencies, policy makers, former and current government officials, members of diplomatic corps, representatives from development partner organizations and media were present during the inaugural session.



# Welcome Address

**Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc**

*Director General, BISS*

At the outset, **Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc**, Director General, BISS, stated that the BIMSTEC is a region that is home to approximately 1.7 billion people which is roughly 22 per cent of the world's population. Changing geopolitical realities in this region ushered in a renewed interest in the Bay of Bengal. Strategically located in the Indian Ocean, BIMSTEC as an integrated region can not only cater to the need of the Second World War dictum of "Asia-Pacific", but also of the emerging notion of "Indo-Pacific". BIMSTEC thus, holds the key for collective prosperity.

The region, however, hosts a diverse range of complex non-traditional security threats, including trafficking of narcotics, weapons and people; illegal exploitation of resources; refugee flows and displacement; insurgencies and terrorism; and natural disasters. There is strong evidence to justify the vitality of security cooperation among the member states. Although BIMSTEC was floated in 1998 with economic priorities, the importance of security issues was felt necessary and included since 2005. Keeping these highly important issues in mind, national security chiefs of member countries have deliberated regularly in the recent years seeking to enhance cooperation in diverse areas, stressing for the Bay of Bengal's recognition as a common security space. He focused on some existing and emerging security threats in the region, showing the nexus between them and their ramifications both within the region and beyond.

He noted that the threat of terrorism remains high all over the world. The menace of terrorism could worsen over the next decade. Terrorists will continue to exploit fragility and weakness in every system all over the world for safe havens and to build skills. Globally, terrorism is likely to aggravate instability and drive international security discourse. The "Fourth Wave of Terrorism", as David Rapoport famously called it, is transnational in nature. Therefore, it cannot be addressed without effective regional cooperation. The first meeting of the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs held in New Delhi, India on 21 March 2017 also emphasized on developing common legal and institutional framework for countering terrorism and transnational crimes. Transnational crime drains hard-earned tax revenues from the coffers of the state, forcing the state to dedicate more financial and human resources to border control and law enforcement. But more importantly, transnational criminal groups often provide support to terrorist organizations worldwide. Transnational crime networks are known to collaborate with terror groups to provide them access to finances and arms. Transnational organized crime also undermines human security in a number of ways. Criminal enterprises can impact upon the health and well-being of individuals. Regions adjacent to narcotics smuggling







routes often witness a rise in drug addiction and the medical and social costs associated with it. BIMSTEC straddles between two notorious drug-producing regions: the Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle.

He highlighted that both terrorism and transnational crime are closely linked with money laundering and financial fraud. More often than not, these crimes are committed in the cyberspace or with the help of the internet. This is why cyber security cooperation is essential. Cyberspace was once used to be just a realm of communication and email. But today it is the source of e-commerce reaching over 10 trillion US dollars a year in sales. It has also expanded to include "critical infrastructure". Modern civilization, ranging from banking to nuclear technologies is heavily reliant on cyberspace. The theft and manipulation of information or commercial activity by stealing large amount of money from bank is becoming common. At the extreme, cyber actors could attack critical national infrastructure such as power grids and financial systems. Hence, cyber security has become a matter of great global concern. There is also a need to tighten cyber security to thwart terrorist recruitment using social media. Interestingly, cyberspace may be global, but it is not "stateless". Hence, the need to work out an effective mechanism for political and technical cooperation under the umbrella of BIMSTEC is necessary.

General Rahman said that another emerging challenge emanates from maritime security. As the world continues to shift from a unipolar to a multi-polar reality, regionally, both the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean are becoming increasingly troubled waters due to great power rivalry. Today, the world economy is also intricately linked with geopolitics. A complex web of alliance system is emerging out of this region. For instance, there are new geo-strategic manoeuvres called "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP), "Quadrilateral The Security Dialogue" (The Quad), Japan's "Partnership for Quality Infrastructure" (PQI) along with China's "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). The sea lanes of the Indian Ocean and the China Seas linking Europe, the Middle East and Africa with Asia are among the busiest in the world. Almost 90,000 vessels in the world's

commercial fleet transport 9.84 billion tonnes per year through this region. Hence, the security of the region is imperative to smooth operation of 50 per cent of global annual trade.

He stated that due to mass displacement caused by conflicts of various nature, the world has witnessed an unprecedented exodus of refugees. According to a UNHCR estimate, roughly 65.6 million people are currently displaced worldwide, primarily as a result of violent conflicts. This problem has reached us as well. About 1.1 million displaced Myanmar nationals crossed over to Bangladesh creating a huge economic and social burden for the country. But this problem is likely to have implications for other countries of this region and beyond. On the other hand, the global humanitarian mechanism for disaster response cannot meet the demands imposed by an increasing number of large-scale disasters of both slow and rapid onsets. These include not only natural disasters, but also man-made ones. In many countries, including in the Asia-Pacific region, humanitarian disaster response is tackled by professionals in various security sectors who are the primary responders in the event of a disaster. These responders include police and military personnel who assist in diverse domestic and international relief efforts. Disaster management exercise will enable Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) providers to share the best practices on comprehensive disaster risk reduction, and strengthen regional response capacity and better coordination for disaster management.

General Rahman concluded his speech by saying that, as the largest bay in the world, the Bay of Bengal is of pivotal importance to the countries bordering it. More broadly, demographic, economic, and security developments in the region have crucial implications for Asia and the global order. But unfortunately, the Bay of Bengal is one of the world's least integrated region, with less than satisfactory levels of regional trade, connectivity, and cooperation. The lack of effective cooperation among the countries of this region stands as an obstacle for a meaningful economic and strategic interdependence. Lastly, he believed that Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum will be successful in consolidating the collective agreement on security threats in BIMSTEC and advancing the shared goal of a prosperous and more integrated region.

# Introductory Remarks

**Ambassador M Shahidul Islam**

*Secretary General, BIMSTEC*

Ambassador M Shahidul Islam, Secretary General, BIMSTEC highlighted that the Bay of Bengal region, home to more than 1.5 billion population with combined GDP of approximately 3 trillion USD has been registering impressive economic growth in recent years. At the same time, this region is also witnessing an increased level of security threats from traditional and non-traditional sources. Being convinced that peace and security is an essential source of sustainable economic development, the leaders of BIMSTEC countries identified counterterrorism and transnational crimes as one of the areas of cooperation. In the present-day counterterrorism and transnational crimes has become the most active sector of cooperation under BIMSTEC framework with frequent meetings and well-developed institutional mechanism. Established in 2014, the Joint Working Group (JWG) on counterterrorism and transnational crimes and its six sub-groups are working to enhance regional cooperation on diverse subjects including intelligence sharing, financing of terrorism, legal and law enforcing issues, trafficking in illicit drugs, human trafficking and countering radicalization.

Ambassador Islam reflected on the 2017 annual meeting of BIMSTEC national security chiefs which was introduced to deal with security issues in a more comprehensive manner. Since then, three meetings have been held so far and the original scope of deliberation expanded from counterterrorism and transnational crimes related issues to subjects like maritime security, cyber security, space security, disaster management, climate change and traditional and non-traditional concerns. Member states meet regularly to discuss ways and means to strengthen their collective efforts to enhance security of the Bay of Bengal region.

Ambassador Islam shared that two counter terrorism-related conventions have been agreed upon. One was the BIMSTEC convention on cooperation in combating international terrorism, transnational organized crimes and illicit drug trafficking signed in 2009. All the member states have also conveyed their readiness to sign the BIMSTEC convention on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters.

He also shared that the first meeting of the BIMSTEC national security chiefs held in March 2017 decided to establish a track 1.5 BIMSTEC security dialogue forum to promote and encourage security dialogue among BIMSTEC strategic and security community. As a follow up to the decision, the 1<sup>st</sup> BIMSTEC track 1.5 security dialogue forum took place at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi on 22 September 2017, with participation of both government officials and scholars from member states. The forum came up with a set of useful





recommendations covering four broad areas namely cooperation in counter terrorism and transnational crimes, violent extremism and radicalization; maritime security cooperation and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; cyber security cooperation in space and space technology; and non-traditional security challenges. These recommendations were presented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting of national security chiefs held in Dhaka in March 2018, which entrusted the joint working group on CTTC to examine the recommendations. It is also noteworthy that the Secretariat while framing the agenda of the meetings of various counter terrorism and cooperation in transnational crimes forums has been duly considering the recommendations of track 1.5 security dialogue.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the track 1.5 BIMSTEC security dialogue forum continues to deliberate on these four themes that were agreed during the 1<sup>st</sup> track 1.5 security dialogue held in New Delhi. The Secretary General hoped that this will provide an opportunity to further build on the common grounds that have been established in this forum earlier and produce innovative and practical ideas to make further progress. He opined that the recommendations that will be made in the security dialogue forum will guide the course of counter terrorism and transnational crimes sector in the coming days. For instance, the first theme related to the threat of terrorism and violent extremism is relevant in the work of the newly created sub group on countering radicalization and terrorism. The recommendations on the 2<sup>nd</sup> theme related to maritime security will be required for setting agenda of the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of ad hoc working group on maritime security scheduled to be held later this year. Ambassador Islam concluded his remarks with the hope that BIMSTEC would benefit from deliberation of this forum in advancing cooperation in all issues of traditional and non-traditional security concerns that BIMSTEC member states are facing at present.

# Introductory Remarks

**Mr Kamrul Ahsan**

*Secretary-Bilateral (Europe, Africa & Americas) and Cosular,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*

Mr Kamrul Ahsan, Secretary-Bilateral (Europe, Africa & Americas) and Cosular, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh (GoB) started his speech by taking the opportunity to extend his heartiest greetings at the auspicious opening ceremony of the Second Meeting of Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum at BISS on behalf of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (GoB), the national focal point of BIMSTEC in Bangladesh. He extended special thanks and appreciation to the Director General of BISS for making beautiful arrangements in organizing the Forum.

He mentioned that regional cooperation is one of the top foreign policy priorities of the Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh. BIMSTEC region comprising seven countries of South Asia and Southeast Asia provides a vibrant platform for high economic growth through regional cooperation. Bangladesh is the founding member of BIMSTEC, attaches high importance to this forum as a regional cooperation process to advance collective economic progress for the peoples of the Bay of Bengal region. Bangladesh's commitment to BIMSTEC is manifested in hosting the BIMSTEC secretariat in Dhaka. He was happy that the present Secretary General is also from Bangladesh. He was further delighted to note that the BIMSTEC process is gradually advancing to achieve its desired goals and objectives.

He opined that Bangladesh's aspiration for economic growth and prosperity in the BIMSTEC region is neither free nor can happen in vacuum. There are multiple challenges that pose threats to its development process. Emerging non-traditional security threats in the BIMSTEC region are one such major challenge towards collective efforts for development. It has to secure its achievements from those challenges and threats through mutual cooperation. He recollected the BIMSTEC leaders Goa retreat in October 2016 and strongly felt that BIMSTEC National Security Advisers' Meeting in 2017 at Delhi, had timely directed the member states to form the Track 1.5 Security Dialogue Forum. The Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina also in her statement at the 4<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit last year reiterated the need for strengthening cooperation in the areas of security and stability among the BIMSTEC member states. She specially stressed upon the security and stability of the member states as one of the top three clusters by reorganizing 14 sectors of cooperation under BIMSTEC.



He expressed his happiness to note that the Second Meeting of BIMSTEC Track 1.5 Security Dialogue Forum is taking place in Dhaka after the first meeting in India. He was particularly grateful to Bangladesh's Honourable Security Adviser, Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique, rcds, psc (retd), for taking special interest in organizing and holding this dialogue in Dhaka. The meeting is taking place at a moment when all are facing challenges of non-traditional security threats in the region. There is a need to devise new and innovative approaches to find out collective solutions to address them and that is why this meeting is very important to all. It was his firm conviction that the learned delegates comprising security experts from and within the region will engage themselves in meaningful debates on contemporary security issues and come up with fruitful outcome during the two days of open deliberation.

He concluded with the hope of looking forward to hear from the Honourable Chief Guest's learned and wise opening statements which he was sure would set the tone of the meeting. He wished all the success to the Second Meeting of Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum.



# Address by the Chief Guest

**Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique, rcds, psc (retd)**

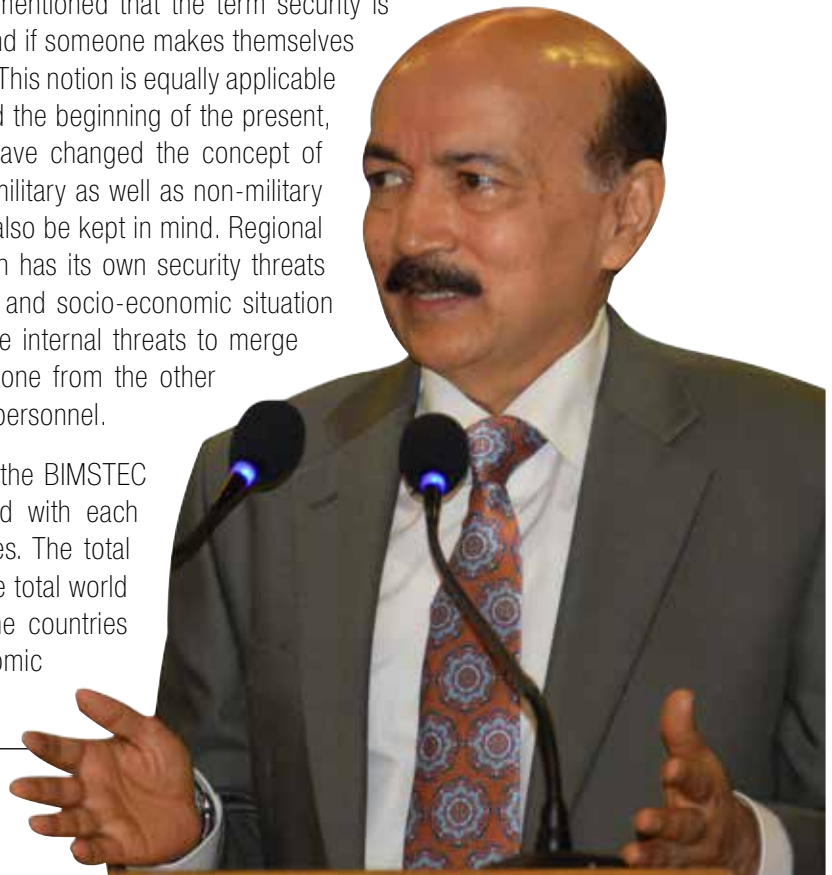
*Security Affairs Adviser to the Honourable Prime Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*

Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique, rcds, psc (retd), Security Affairs Adviser to the Honourable Prime Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, at the outset, expressed his heartfelt thanks for inviting him to the gathering and said that it was an honour to be present in the meeting. He noted that the second meeting of the "Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum" is the pillar of the BIMSTEC security issues and thus a lot of importance is put on it. The last meeting of the security dialogue forum was held in India. Bangladesh has always been committed towards stronger regional cooperation and the BIMSTEC is an outcome of that commitment with the littoral countries.

The honourable Adviser highlighted that the regional organizations in this region have not been able to bloom properly, while in case of other regions, regional organizations have been performing extremely well. Here, he gave the example of ASEAN in the nearest region. He said that the BIMSTEC initiative was started with India's intention of looking east and Thailand's intention of looking west. And so far, BIMSTEC has been working well and the member states have been gaining dividends out of it.

Talking about the concept of security, he mentioned that the term security is relative; one can never say that they are secured. And if someone makes themselves over-secured, their neighbours start to feel insecure. This notion is equally applicable to nations as well. At the end of the last century and the beginning of the present, the world has gone through many changes that have changed the concept of security. The nature of threats now includes many military as well as non-military issues, while regional and global environment must also be kept in mind. Regional security is also very important because each region has its own security threats defined by their geographical location, geopolitical and socio-economic situation and conditions. Globalization has made many of the internal threats to merge and become a global one. It's hard to distinguish one from the other thereby creating crucial challenges for the security personnel.

General Siddique continued by saying that the BIMSTEC members have shared history, and are connected with each other through common values, culture and destinies. The total population of the region is more than one-fifth of the total world population. This factor is a huge advantage for the countries to achieve security, technological and economic







cooperation, from the Himalayas to the Blue Economy of the Bay of Bengal. And that is why BIMSTEC was formed. The Bangladeshi Prime Minister has been very much involved in the BIMSTEC process and in the '2016 Goa Retreat', she was the one who proposed to strengthen the security aspect of BIMSTEC. Initially, BIMSTEC was more focused on economic activity and other areas. It was her proposal to have a separate forum to discuss the intricacies of the security threats that exist in the region. Based on that proposal, the BIMSTEC 'national security advisers/chiefs conference' was initiated. India became the first country to host the security chief's conference in 2017 and then followed by Dhaka in 2018. In 2019, the third security chief's conference was hosted by Thailand and next year it will be hosted by Myanmar, who had volunteered this year to host the next conference.

He then deliberated on the type of security that may be adopted by BIMSTEC. There are different schools of thought that deal with security. During the Cold War, there were concepts such as collective security, comprehensive security and others. But honourable Adviser noted that in today's world, cooperative security is the best approach to deal with regional security concerns. The concept of cooperative security believes that nations have more common interest and shared risk than they have opposing interest. The common interest is that countries want to grow economically and secure their people. The same is with threats, there are more common threats that the BIMSTEC countries share with each other than the opposing interest. The main objective here is to mitigate shared concerns. Though one can never achieve complete security, the aim is to keep it within a tolerable level.

He said that all the BIMSTEC countries have considerable shared security concerns including terrorism and violent extremism. The recent incidents in Sri Lanka and India justify the necessity of cooperation in countering terrorism and violent extremism in the Bay of Bengal region. There are also various non-traditional security concerns as well, such as climate change-induced issues, energy scarcity, forced migration and displacement, cyber security, threats posed by non-curable diseases etc. Therefore, this security dialogue forum has a lot to discuss on. But since it is not possible to focus on all the issues, the BIMSTEC secretariat and BISS have decided to divide the issues into four groups.





The honourable Adviser then talked about Bangladesh's success in the area of countering terrorism and violent extremism. He said that Bangladesh has been remarkably successful in curbing the threat of terrorism and violent extremism. The present government accelerated the process by adopting a 'zero tolerance' policy which was declared by the Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The moment she ascended to power in 2009, she declared that Bangladesh will not tolerate terrorists in its territory. Under her leadership, Bangladesh changed its policies and is no longer a safe haven for the terrorists. The 'zero tolerance' policy of the government is implemented through laws, specialized agencies dealing with the issue and community mobilization. The counter-terrorism operations are also being carried out by the Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit (CTTC) and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). Here he also addressed the issue of some controversy surrounding these agencies. He assured the audience that the members of these agencies are not above the laws and get severe punishment if they are caught doing anything wrong. He also said that even if the press often raises a hue and cry about the dealings of these agencies, they do not want these agencies out of action; and this is because the agencies have been doing a good job in keeping the 'law and order' and gained people's confidence. He said that the intelligence agencies are also doing very well and taking pro-active actions against terrorism. Many people think that Bangladesh is lucky because it has not had a major terrorist attack on its soil in the last two-three years. But it's not just due to luck; the law enforcing agencies of Bangladesh have been performing extremely well in preventing the terrorist attacks before they can happen.

Not only in case of terrorism, but Bangladesh has also actually taken a number of noteworthy initiatives in each of the concerns of non-traditional security that has been included in the discussion of this security forum. He opined that Bangladesh also recognizes the importance of tracking militant finances, which is why Bangladesh is the first country in South Asia to promulgate money laundering prevention act in 2012

(this was done in line with the recommendation of financial action task force). Bangladesh has also declared a 'zero tolerance' policy on drug, to free the society of this evil. The Honourable Prime Minister has also instructed the concerned officials to remain vigilant against terrorist use of the cyberspace, attack against critical infrastructure, cyber theft and keeping up with sharing data and information with officials of the partner countries.

He then talked about the emerging concept of 'hybrid threat'. 'Hybrid threat' is a fusion of a number of threats together. He gave a simple definition, "the hybrid threats are the methods and activities that are targeted towards vulnerabilities of the opponent". Vulnerabilities can be many things, including geostrategic factors, technological disadvantages or social and ideological differences. These threats can be generated internally or externally.

He also highlighted the achievement of Bangladesh in terms of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). Bangladesh is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and managing disasters is one of the major factors that have helped in its growing economy. Earlier the natural disasters used to take the economy back and now Bangladesh has been able to tackle the negative impacts of the disasters and progressed ahead. It is recognized worldwide as 'disaster managers'. Here the Honourable Adviser thanked India for organizing disaster management exercise recently, where Bangladesh was able to share its best practices in comprehensive aspects of disaster risk reduction with others. He said that in this regard, an independent force for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) under BIMSTEC can be very useful.

In the end, he said that Bangladesh is delighted to host the event in Dhaka. He hoped that participants had a fruitful event, and urged them to discuss the existing and emerging security threats facing the region. He said that in the last conference of the National Security Advisers, they had discussed on the issues that were deliberated at the 1st 'Track 1.5 Security Dialogue Forum' held in 2017. So, he hoped that the outcome document of this forum will be just as rich so that it can be discussed at the next security advisers meeting. On that note, he ended his speech with officially declaring the commencement of the 'Second Meeting of Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum'.



# Open Discussion & Responses:

**M. Shamsher Ali**, Former Vice Chancellor, Southeast University and founding Vice-Chancellor of Bangladesh Open University, Bangladesh pointed out that different sectors like security, trade and commerce and tourism are nicely incorporated in the BIMSTEC. In this respect, he suggested having a knowledge sharing sector in BIMSTEC. He added that in the last BIMSTEC forum at Delhi, Indian Pugwash society was involved. Being a nuclear scientist, he has been a strong adherent of International Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. He informed that Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) and NPT were all results of this Pugwash conference. However, non-traditional security, climate change, health and nutrition are very important ingredients of security dialogue but they need knowledge sharing. And knowledge sharing is international. In this region, different organizations like SAARC are successful in the exchange of football delegations and teams as well as cultural teams but not in the case of water and energy. Energy is needed because people of this region are starving of energy. Energy forms a very important part of this security dialogue. Moreover, these issues require sharing of knowledge. In this respect, he suggested very humbly to BIMSTEC to have a knowledge sharing sector on their agenda.



**Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique, rcds, psc (retd)** stated that he agreed with the recommendation to have a knowledge sharing sector under BIMSTEC. He also requested BIMSTEC Secretary-General to take note of it and put it on the report and send it to the BIMSTEC headquarters.

**Towhida Farooqi**, Former Director General, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Bangladesh at the outset of her deliberations thanked the Prime Minister of Bangladesh for minimizing terrorism throughout the country, which has been more or less successful. She pointed out: the issue of drug trafficking which has spread out in the country drastically. She asked whether the steps taken by the government of Bangladesh is enough to control the drugs or not. The rules and regulations that the government has introduced are fine but the implementation should also be strengthened. Bangladesh has progressed in different sectors, but if the young generation is spoiled then it will be hard to prosper. The carriers of drugs also need to be identified and should be punished.





Hon'ble Security Adviser **Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique**, rcds, psc (retd) in his reply noted that last year the hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh declared 'zero tolerance' on drugs. It is not only the drug coming from the neighbouring territories, for example Golden Triangle or Golden Crescent, but drugs are also been produced inside. Even in the rail station it is seen that the Bengali people are very innovative and brain is very sharp, as they burn some glues and inhale them to get intoxicated. Social participation is required to identify the carriers of drugs. The petty carriers are caught, there is a law that if it is not more than 50 Yaba's then the carrier is put into imprisonment for a few days and he gets released. Thus, there is a need to reach the root initiator who has bought it or bringing it. In Teknaf there are many drug incidents in which huge amount of money is earned. He requested all to make an effort at the local level by informing the law enforcement agencies about the drug peddlers.



**Rasid Reza**, a Journalist from Prothom Alo (Bangla National daily from Bangladesh), said that Bangladesh despite having resource constraint had opened up their heart for the Rohingya population. But even after two years, the environment on the other side of the border is not prepared for accepting the Rohingyas. But now the, in addition to the socio-economic challenges, the Rohingya population is bringing security challenges as well. In that context, how can BIMSTEC work to solve this problem.

**Major General Siddique** replied that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and now the countries, Bangladesh and Myanmar are in a position where they can talk to each other. Here the international help has been tremendous, the countries such as Canada, USA have been putting a lot of pressure on Myanmar. He said that there is a need to achieve something concrete here. He said that for the Rohingyas to go back there needs to be an improved environment, and at least a house where they can go back to. But in that area, there has not been much progress. This issue has been brought to the attention of international organizations. He highlighted that if the issue is not resolved, it will entrap into a vicious circle and their vulnerabilities will be exploited. And that will have a rippling effect in the region and globally. He added that this problem should be solved by looking into the issue from practical point of view, leaving the ego behind.

Rear Admiral (Retd.) **Md. Khurshed Alam**, Secretary (Maritime Affairs Unit) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh congratulated BIMSTEC for bringing up the security dialogue. He opined that issues actually related to the Bay of Bengal and adjoining areas should be emphasized here within the BIMSTEC. Other security complexes should not be replicated here as some of the issues are not present in this region



**Professor Dr Indrajit Rai**, Academic Expert from Nepal stated that security only confines to defence personnel. However, in this meeting BIIS called enlightened academicians and civil society people as well. For this reason, a different dimension of security become visible. Thus, he appreciated the initiative.



**Ashraf Ibne Noor**, Bangabandhu Nou Parishad (a civil society platform from Bangladesh) said that maritime security is very big with a wide scope of things, which should be tackled in a more serious manner. By security, one genuinely thinks about land security only. Without maritime security, land security will not eventually survive. The maritime security is not only piracy but only economic piracy as well. Piracy is not only about looting ships and vessels, keeping hostages etc but economic piracy needs to be tackled with much attention. Without the consent of the neighbouring countries, the people taking commercial outputs from the sea cannot be tackled.

Hon'ble Chief Guest **Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique**, rcds, psc (retd) shared his experience of Indian Ocean Rim seminar in which exactly the things mentioned by Ashraf Ibne Noor had been discussed.

**Barrister Harnur or Rashid**, DIG, ICT, Police Headquarters, said that in recent times, the terrorists are exploiting the cyberspace, they are not only using the email, but also using the social media, which is very hard to control. They also use encrypted messages and other resources, which requires high level of technical knowledge to tackle. In this regard, he asked if there can be any kind of technical cooperation under the BIMSTEC umbrella for capacity building on cyber security.



**Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique**, rcds, psc (retd), replied that there are cooperative initiative and information sharing between Bangladesh and the neighbouring countries, especially India. Bangladesh is working to crack the encrypted social media, which is being used by the terrorists. The new organization called National

Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC) is also working on the issue, so are the other law enforcing agencies. But he also urged the parents to take care of their children so that they are not addicted to internet.



**Nurul Islam Hasib** from BDNews24.com wanted to know what would be Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique's call on the Rohingya issue because, in the last year's Summit in Kathmandu, there was no mention of this issue.

**Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique**, rcds, psc (retd) referred to the National Security Advisors meeting held in last March where the Prime Minister of Thailand himself raised the Rohingya issue. The National Security Advisor of Myanmar was also present in the meeting. General Tarique opined that they all agree but things are not clicking. He suggested that everyone should rise above egoism, should not care who is going down or loosing and concentrate on solving the problem. A solution has to be made. He shared his optimism that he was seeing some light at the end of the tunnel which gives him hope.

**Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad**, Former Chairman, BISS stated that in most cases when people talked about the security architecture and security compact, they have a feeling that they are all exclusive. In such cases, it is as always, a recipe for conflicts. In this respect, he wanted to know whether it is possible to think of a more inclusive security compact and architecture where nobody and no countries are enemies. However, there might have existed crucial threats which need to be addressed.







Hon'ble Security Adviser noted that regional cooperation should be based on sharing common threats rather than avoiding the bone of contention and disagreements. There is a need to work on the agreements that this region has. In this respect, he informed that for this reason Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina suggested for this National Security Advisers (NSA) conference because these advisers are always connected to highest state machinery. If they agree then the state machinery of the respective countries will be agreed. It is blooming. Only the three meetings have been completed. He also informed that the next meeting will be held on Myanmar which is encouraging. He also hoped that in the next meeting Rohingya issues will get some solutions. He added that every time Bangladesh does not blame Myanmar rather requests to sit and talk.

Ambassador Brig Gen (Retd) Chowdhury Khalequzzaman, Bangladesh in his remarks thanked the Prime Minister for delivering the message of the plight of Rohingyas throughout the world, but unfortunately fruitful responses are not coming forward. The main problem is that the Arakan was a land of Muslims once, and the Rakhine state is choking on wealth, he called it a "wealth of curse". All the resources are piled in the land below; pipeline has been laid from Arakan to India and China. The top leaders of the world say to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh that "we are beside you", but nobody has loudly said "we will help you in solving the problem". He has gone to every village of the landless and stateless Rohingyas in Mongru, Budidong etc., and see that the tragedy is paramount. With a heavy heart he said that not only Muslims but also Hindus, Christians were suffering there as well. The reason is the place is very rich in resources- gold, diamond etc. and everybody wants to live in that place. Around 1.1 million Rohingyas has been pushed to Bangladesh which is a very big security problem. It is very difficult to send them back.



Hon'ble Chief Guest Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique, rcds, psc (ret'd) mentioned that the security dimensions are emerging very vigorously and Rohingyas are also getting involved in it. They are being hired for doing different criminal activities and immoral things. Though Bangladesh can feed 1.1 million as the hon'ble Prime Minister said, that cannot solve the problem, and pushing them back is also inhumane. The foreign NGOs must ensure that they are safe on the other side, otherwise they will not go. The Rohingyas are very hard working people and are being further hardened by the realities. That is why he foresees danger and hints about hybrid security, both traditional and non-traditional security threats are coming up and it is going to be a hotspot. He concluded by saying that once it becomes a hotspot, it will be very difficult like many of the conflicts of the present, to cool it down.



Engr Rashed Maksud Khan, President, Bangladesh Philippines Chamber of Commerce & Industry, said that Bangladesh has been members of many regional organizations but none has been successful, but even then, Bangladesh has high hopes for BIMSTEC forum that it will work as a link between the SAARC and the ASEAN countries. He said that while the security and economic issues are very important, the people to people connectivity is also very important, and without the connection between people, the initiative will not be successful.

# Concluding Remarks by the Chair



**Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc**  
*Director General, BISS*

In his concluding remarks, Major General A K M Abdur Rahman ndc, psc, said that the opening session was one of the most extensive and vibrant opening sessions he had experienced during his time at BISS. He specially thanked the Chief Guest for handling the questions with grace and intellect and setting the tone for the coming working sessions. He also hoped that the participants from the member countries of BIMSTEC will give deep thoughts to the issues highlighted by the Chief Guest. He expressed his hope that the forum will be able to come up with some concrete recommendations for BIMSTEC on security matters. Finally, he thanked everyone for their participation and cooperation.



# Working Session – I

## Threat of Terrorism and Violent Extremism and Responses by the BIMSTEC Countries

The first Working Session was entitled “Threat of Terrorism and Violent Extremism and Responses by the BIMSTEC Countries”. In this session, presentations were made by **Mr Md Monirul Islam**, Additional Commissioner of Police and Chief, Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) Unit, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), Bangladesh; **Colonel Tshewang Rinzin**, Officiating Deputy Chief of Police, Crime and Operation Branch, Royal Bhutan Police, HQs, Bhutan; **Hemant Harishchandra Kotalwar**, Joint Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), India; **Police Colonel Naing Ye Thu**, Division against Transnational Crime, Head of Enforcement Department, Ministry of Home Affairs, Myanmar; **Professor Indrajit Rai**, Academic expert, Nepal; **Mrs D D Nirasha Nirangani Dissanayake**, Deputy Director (Policy & Planning), Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka; **Mr Arthit Thongin**, Lecturer, Sukhothai Thammarat Open University; and **Mr. M Ashique Rahman**, Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Bangladesh. The session was chaired by **Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed**, Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka.





# Presentation - I



**Mr. Md. Monirul Islam**

*Additional Commissioner, Chief, CTTC, DMP, Bangladesh*

At the outset, **Mr. Md. Monirul Islam**, Additional Commissioner, Chief, CTTC, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), Bangladesh presented a brief overview of the issues that he will cover as part of his discussion on terrorism and counterterrorism in Bangladesh. It would include the rise of Islamic extremism, a brief history of terrorism and emerging trends, counterterrorism efforts undertaken by the government and the counter terrorism challenges ahead for Bangladesh. Mr Md Monirul Islam stated that terrorism is a grave menace spreading all over the world at a mercurial speed. Bangladesh, despite having secularism as its one of the four founding principles, has been experiencing this threat for the last two decades. After the brutal killing of the founding father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, the then regimes abandoned secular ideology and started rehabilitating proscribed religion-based parties that ultimately gave rise to Islamic extremism in Bangladesh. The Soviet-Afghan conflict fueled this extremist ideology and a remarkable number of people mostly from Madrassa background joined to fight against Soviet soldiers in eighties. After the civil war was over, those individuals returned from Afghanistan with training, knowledge, experience, international connections and inspiration from the so-called jihadist ideology propagated by Al Qaeda. The Afghan returnees after their initial preparation created HUJI-B in 1992 in Bangladesh. Later, in 1998, from the inspiration of Al-Qaeda global network another outfit JMB emerged. Mr Islam stated that a paradigm shift in terrorism tactics after the 9/11 attack can be seen. In 2002, globally inspired Hijbut Tahrir chapter started its activities with an aim to establish a caliphate. A massive use of online platforms can be seen since 2004- particularly the introduction of Facebook facilitated networked terrorism and remote recruitment. The year 2013 is another significant episode for Bangladesh which saw the rise of atrocious killer group Ansarullah Bangla Team targeting secular online activists. Finally, the proclamation of so-called Caliphate by IS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, and announcement of a new branch, Al Qaeda in the India Subcontinent by AQ leader Zawahiri in 2014 created a global appeal resulting in formation of Neo-JMB and Ansarul Islam in Bangladesh.

To address the rising threats of terrorism, the government declared 'zero tolerance' policy on terrorism in Bangladesh in 2009. As per the policy, the government has so far proscribed 7 terrorist outfits in Bangladesh i.e Harkat-ul-Jihad al Islam, Bangladesh (HUJI-B); Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB); Jagrata Muslim



Janata, Bangladesh (JMJB); Shahadat al Hikma (SAH); Hizbut Tahrir (HT); Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) and Ansar Al Islam (AAI). The members and those supporting these outfits are punishable under the Anti-terrorism law which was enacted in 2009. But despite the 'zero tolerance' policy, by looking at the number of attacks and casualties from 1999 to 2019 by different groups it can be seen that HUJI-B has conducted 16 attacks causing the highest fatalities i.e killing of 145 people, JMB has operated 11 attacks killing 27 people, ABT/AAI has conducted 15 attacks killing 17 people and Neo-JMB which follows the ideology of Islamic States has operated 27 attacks causing death of 58 people.

At this point in the presentation Mr Md Monirul Islam briefed on some of key terrorist attacks in Bangladesh. He mentioned about the most dastardly grenade attack by HUJI-B on the present Prime Minister who was then the leader of the opposition, on her political rally on 21st August in 2004 which killed 24 leaders and activists of her party and severely injured hundreds including herself. The JMB perpetrated synchronized bomb blast in 500 places in 63 districts out of 64 simultaneously on 17 August in 2005. Neo JMB was responsible for the iconic attack at Holey Artisan Bakery on 1st July in 2016 that killed 22 people including 17 foreigners and 2 police officers.

Next, Mr Islam shared some of the success stories of Bangladesh in the field of counter-terrorism. He mentioned that Bangladesh security agencies have successfully countered terrorism. Bangladesh police has succeeded to disrupt terrorist networks significantly, particularly the 26 high-risk operations conducted by Bangladesh Police killing 75 high profile terrorists has achieved success in weakening the functioning capacity of terrorist network all over the country. More than thousands of terrorists have been arrested. Therefore, the network has been dismantled by causing leadership crises through identification of masterminds, co-planners, financiers and other facilitators. Strict surveillance over suspects is being ensured to prevent further operational



activities and collection of intelligence is enabling security agencies to thwart terrorist's plots after the Holey Artisan attack in 2016.

Mr Islam shared that due to the 'zero tolerance' policy against terrorism and government counter-terrorism efforts, the number of attacks is decreasing significantly. Comparing to 2016 the terrorist incidents have been decreased by 90 per cent in 2018. However, the Holey Artisan incident has revealed that the demography of target audience has been changed; contrary to the popular notions about causal links between poverty, madrassa education and support for violent extremism, youths from educated and affluent society are being involved in terrorism. The result of study by Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit revealed that out of the 711 arrested terror suspects, 56 per cent are university graduates. Youths of 15-30 years are vulnerable to radicalization. Radicalization through social media is a common global phenomenon. In another survey on 302 suspects arrested in last three and half year, it was revealed that 82 per cent terrorists were using social media, that facilitated their radicalization process, mainly Facebook. Now most of them have international connection. Transnational groups are also trying to establish hence, connection with regional and international groups. Mr. Islam deliberated that regional cooperation is needed to fight them united. With the sharing of knowledge, experience, training and good practices, this menace could be fought together. Thus, he proposed the sharing of intelligence among the BIMSTEC countries.

# Presentation – II



**Colonel Tshewang Rinzin**

*Officiating Deputy Chief of Police, Crime and Operation Branch, Royal Bhutan Police, HQs, Bhutan*

Colonel Tshewang Rinzin, Officiating Deputy Chief of Police, Crime and Operation Branch, Royal Bhutan Police, (HQs), Bhutan said that while Bhutan has so far not directly felt the tremors of terrorism, the Royal Government of Bhutan recognizes that it needs to be prepared to prevent and act against terrorism in light of its transnational nature. Given the nature of topography including thick vegetation, open and porous border, and harsh climatic conditions, Bhutan foresees a huge challenge in countering the threat of terrorism in various forms and manifestations.

He stated that over the years, Bhutan has also foreseen the emerging threats associated with terrorism and violent extremism which included increasing youth unemployment, substance abuse, income disparity, cross border crimes, migration issues, geographical plight, change of faith, etc. For this reason, Bhutan has accorded priority to the aforementioned issues by identifying certain National Key Result Areas (NKRAs) in the 12 Five Year Plan to address these issues. For instance, NKRA 3-reducing poverty and inequality, NKRA 11-productive and gainful employment, NKRA 16- effective justice services, etc.

In addition to this, Bhutan supports regional and global initiatives against terrorism and has ratified several international legal instruments against terrorism. Bhutan is a signatory to the UN treaties/convention on suppression and financing of terrorism and its protocols. Bhutan is a member of SAARC Convention on Mutual Assistance in criminal matters, SAARC Regional Convention on the suppression of terrorism and its additional protocol, and the country is also a member of Interpol since 19 September 2005.

Colonel Rinzin said that the progress achieved by the BIMSTEC Countries in different areas of cooperation, including the threat of terrorism, maritime security, non-traditional security threats, climate change, etc., stands as a testimony to the commitment of the peoples of our region toward collective prosperity and security. He opined that the responsibility to strive for the ideals envisioned by the founding fathers falls on every citizen of this region, and forums of this kind open up an avenue for experts and scholars to discuss and share experiences on different thematic issues, which all add up to the overarching objectives of the BIMSTEC.

Finally, Colonel Rinzin said security issues come in different shapes and colours and are, for the most part, cross-cutting and multidimensional in nature. Addressing these issues demand collective effort and are, therefore, not mutually exclusive. However, he highlighted that any initiative undertaken to address security concerns should not come at the expense of duplicating the existing mechanisms in place.





# Presentation – III



**Hemant Harishchandra Kotalwar**

*Joint Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), India*

At the outset, **Hemant Harishchandra Kotalwar**, Joint Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), India noted that the Track 1.5 dialogue is very important and India had the opportunity to host the first dialogue. The second dialogue on this important topic has set a new momentum within BIMSTEC.

He pointed out that India is the victim of terror both state-sponsored and no-state for the last three decades. It's nothing new for India and the country has been tackling this menace in their own way. He informed that counter-radicalization is an important aspect of India's counter terrorism strategy. He then mentioned about a recently published book by his royal highness prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, the prince of Jordan titled "A Thinking Person's Guide to Islam". In this book, the author makes a very important observation. He analyzes the number of citizens that had joined in the IS country from various countries. Tunisia remains at the top with 549 fighters followed by Maldives with 500, Jordan with 303 and so on. The book says that the number of Indian fighters is minuscule as a percentage of the Muslim population or even that of the country's population.

Similarly, there is a report of 2018, entitled "Spiders of the Caliphate: Mapping the Islamic State's Global Support Network on Facebook". This report analyzes the strength of the Islamic State's (IS) network on Facebook using online network measurement tools and uncovers the myriad of ways in which IS operates on Facebook. The report mapped the accounts and connections between 1,000 IS-supporting Facebook profiles with links to 96 countries on every continent using the open-source network analysis and visualization software, Gephi. The report analyzes different regions and their connection with the other regions. As far as the South Asian region is concerned, the report makes a very interesting observation. It talks about two dense networks in the South Asian region. One locates at Afghanistan/Pakistan region and another is basically around Bangladesh. The isolated South Asia network consists of 13 unconnected nodes and two main communities with one shared node. Here node means a profile or facebook profile of a IS operators. These are connected through just one supporter of IS in India. The Afghanistan/Pakistan network is made of two communities: one centred in Afghanistan and other centred in Pakistan and these networks are further connected to the Southeast Asian network in Indonesia to Filipino and a node from Myanmar. Bangladesh network is connected

to Iraq, Syria and North Africa. But it is not connected to Afghanistan/Pakistan network. This report makes it very clear that despite the large population, the number of Indians who had joined IS is minimal. In fact, out of the Muslim population of a hundred and eighty million people, only 100 to 125 people had joined IS.

In this respect, he raised several questions why India does not figure on the IS supporter recruitment, why the response of Indian Muslims is so muted? He stated that to understand these questions, it is important to know how Islam entered in Indian subcontinent. The flow of Islam into Indian subcontinent came through two routes e.g., land route and sea route. The sea route was connected by the traders mainly the spice trade that was happening between Arab world and India. The Arab trader basically got Islam to the western part of India. By the land route, Islam did not come directly from Arabia. It went from Mesopotamia, from Mesopotamia went to Spain, from Spain to Syria and then entered into the Indian subcontinent. Therefore, when Islam entered into the Indian subcontinent, it was not the same Islam that started in Arabia. It had picked up different cultures, beliefs, languages and social understandings along the way. Hence, Islam in the north of India is quite different from western part of India e.g., Karnataka, Maharashtra, etc. He noted that Islam in North India basically influenced by the Islamic philosophy of Wahdul –Al Wajud. This philosophy basically says that God is present everywhere. If one believes in God then one also believes in the creation of God. This is very similar to the adhere philosophy of Hinduism. He stressed that there were a lot of similarities between Islam that had entered into India from the land route and the philosophy which was in India earlier.

He added that similarly IS, the terror organization has a philosophy called Wal Wala Wal Bara (loyalty and disloyalty) which is followed by the Takfiris basically the Salafist. The philosophy says that you love in the name of god and equally hate in the name of god. It means that Muslims must not be friends with people of other religions e.g., Jews and Christians instead, consider them as enemy. It also means that Islam prohibits social interaction with non-Muslims including wishing them on different festivals. This philosophy basically divides people between us and them.

He informed that in fact the majority of Muslims in India was influenced by the Islam that was brought in over the period of time by the Sufi saints like Nizamuddin Auliya and Moinuddin Chishti. This Indo-Muslim and Ganga-Jamuna, Egypt client of culture, based on the intertwining of Bhakt Marg and Islamic Sufism is responsible for the composite culture of India. This culture originated in an environment of reconciliation rather than refutation, cooperation rather than confrontation and coexistence rather than mutual annihilation. The Sufi and Bhakti movements blurred the differences between the two religions so much that it is very common for people to have a subgroup or a pair having a common following of Hindus and Muslims. No pair or subgroup ever forced a Hindu or a Muslim to give up his religion for another religion. He said that India has been able to preserve this composite culture that it has gained over a period of time through sanctuary, democratic institutions, free press, independent judiciary and all other fundamental rights provided by the constitution. These remain as the bedrock to address the grievances of the people.

With regard to India's counter-radicalization strategy, he stated that it has basically two elements, e.g., delegitimize violence and deglamorize violence. From his conversation with radicalized persons, he found that firstly, radicalized persons are completely one eighty-degree shift. While a common man likes to enjoy happiness, the radicalized person aspires to benefit from his death. He is looking for future benefits. Secondly, dilution of humanity and self-preservation. The radicalized persons are ready to give up their life for some future assurance of good life. Thirdly, animals will think hundred times before killing an animal but the radicalized persons are ready to kill anyone and take pride in doing that. Thus, the strategy of India is to delegitimize the source of legitimacy. It includes involving the Ulama's. From them it is found that there are twenty-four verses from the Quran that are often quoted out of context to justify violence. Hence, the role of

intellectuals and clergy is important to denounce jihad or what they are undertaking. In this respect, he put several recommendations. First, the Ulama's must highlight through Quranic verses that jihad is undertaken under certain conditions and limited people have the power to declare it. Second, most of the mother's needs to introduce these chapters that denounce violence and terror in order to distract children from this path. Third, point must be made that the action of these people is civil strife, not jihad. Fourth, similarly in the mosque the Moulovi should not talk on international issues but on day to day local issues that affect the common man. Fifth, extremists' environment typically exploits the internet and social media as a platform for spreading propaganda, recruiting new followers and coordinating activities which enables them to disseminate symbols, images, films, music, etc. Now a day, this medium is most dangerous because people become radicalized even without physical contact. Hence, a multipronged strategy is needed to counter extremist propaganda and prevent radicalization via internet and social media. Sixth, dissemination of extremists online must be curbed by weakening the appeal and attraction of extremists' message and by strengthening the young people, resilience to extremist propaganda. Finally, these efforts to counter radicalization cannot succeed without international cooperation. Thus, it must be remembered that terrorism has no religion and needs to be defeated in all its forms and manifestations. In this respect, he stated that India has received immense cooperation from gulf countries and also from the government of Bangladesh.

He concluded by hoping that BIMSTEC becomes a thriving forum for enhancing international cooperation to combat the spread of terrorist ideologies. BIMSTEC should have a zero tolerance for extremism and terrorism.





# Presentation – IV



## **Police Colonel Naing Ye Thu**

*Division against Transnational Crime, Head of Enforcement Department  
Ministry of Home Affairs, Myanmar*

Police Colonel Naing Ye Thu, Division against Transnational Crime, Head of Enforcement Department Ministry of Home Affairs, Myanmar started his speech referring to the military attacks of ISIL in recent times. The world had not accepted their ideology and there were spread of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) around the globe. Terrorist threats such as persuading people, reorganizing and conducting their terrorist activities will be continued. South Asia and Southeast Asia are currently facing unprecedented terror as terrorist groups are losing ground in Syria and Iraq and seek to establish new footholds elsewhere.

In this condition, Myanmar has enacted a Counter Terrorism Law in July 2014. According to the CT law of Myanmar, Central Committee for Counter Terrorism was established in 2015. To combat terrorism effectively, Counter Terrorism Department was established under Myanmar Police Force in the Ministry of Home Affairs. Then in 2015, Special Task Force was moved under the CT Department. In order to implement counter terrorism measures, drafting of the law is still going on. At present, the draft has been submitted and circulated in the parliament. Moreover, it has established a Find and Investigation Unit (FIU) under the Myanmar Police in accordance with the CT law to prevent terrorist activities and support to terrorism and prevent financing of terrorism. Myanmar has anti-money-laundering law and also established a central committee for anti-money-laundering. It became member of the UN Counter Terrorism Committee (UNCTC) in 2004 and has ratified the conventions and protocols on the UN counter terrorism related agreements and declarations.

Also, Myanmar has enacted institutional law in 2017. National Risk Assessment Committee (NRAC) was formed and signed by Anti Money-Laundering Central Board (AMLCB) in 2015 for anti-money laundering and combating financing to terrorism. Myanmar made bilateral agreements and MoUs on exchanging the financial investigation information with 12 countries. Apart from the international cooperation in combating terrorism, Myanmar is closely cooperating with INTERPOL, ASEANAPOL, UNODC, ASEAN Intelligence Community Counter Terrorism Committee (AIC- CTC) and BIMSTEC as well. In order to devise countering terrorism mechanism, Myanmar has been struggling for conducting internal and external capacity building training and activities contributed by the international agencies and partner countries. Now Myanmar has been implementing counter terrorism cooperation with regional and international entities, signed MoUs and formed

necessary laws. Myanmar has already ratified BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking and its now ready to sign BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters.

Myanmar has signed MoU on Cooperation in counter terrorism with Russia and China and moreover signed MoU with Australia. Besides, in order to fight money laundering and to exchange information on financial support for terrorist activities, Myanmar has signed MoU with 12 countries including six member states of BIMSTEC- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. In summary, the MoUs signed all together is 20 with BIMSTEC member countries in the areas of capacity building, preventing illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, exchange of information, security cooperation, cooperation in non-traditional security issues and other transnational crimes related to counter terrorism. And it is preparing to seek for more MoUs within member states of BIMSTEC on financing of terrorism, extradition in criminal matters and security cooperation. On the other hand, National Crisis Management Committee and sub-committees are already organized and trying to build the mechanism and layout of Standard Operation Procedure in time of any emergency situation.

As for the current terrorist threats to Myanmar, Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) was established in September 2014, which supported terrorist activities of India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Tehrik-e -Taliban Pakistan (TTP) released a statement on July 26, 2012, calling the Pakistani government to cut off its relations with Myanmar and to shut down the Myanmar embassy in Islamabad. In June 2015, TTP said it would facilitate training and other supports for Myanmar Muslims to fight against Myanmar government. ISIS stated the threat to Myanmar in their official online Magazine Dabiq in volume 14 issued in 2016 that they will begin launching operations within Myanmar once they have capability to do so and they intend to be more effective to strengthen the jihad front in Bengal first before launching their major attacks in Myanmar. In October 2016, terrorist attacks occurred in Maungdaw, a township near the western border. The terrorist groups attacked Myanmar border police posts. The main leading group of the terrorist is Aqamul Mujahidin so-called Harakah al-Yaqin. Some of the leaders of this group have experience in modern guerrilla warfare and explosives. There are some indications of training and solidarity links with international jihadist organizations.

In August 2017, the terrorist group namely Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacked at 46 Myanmar border police posts in Rakhine state and also attacked native villages. These terrorist attacks were by groups who call themselves 'Aqa Mul Mujahidin' or 'Harakah al-Yaqin'. These terrorist groups got supports from some terrorist organizations. Meanwhile, the international extremist groups are calling for jihad in Myanmar. Myanmar government declared ARSA as a terrorist organization on 25 August 2017. They used the name Harakah al-Yaqin in 2016, changing the name to ARSA in the later year. In summary, in both attacks in 2016 and 2017, 486 terrorists and 31 security personnel were killed. So many innocent people living in that area were killed in those incidents. 140 Muslim people, 57 indigenous, 53 Hindus and 18 other from the family members of government services, altogether 299 innocent people were killed and 45 Hindus are still missing. The Central Committee on Counter Terrorism declared ARSA as a terrorist group. Myanmar requested Interpol Counter Terrorism Department and the neighbouring countries to arrest the terrorist attackers, send data of over 1600 terrorists and the data of 785, who were involved in those terrorist attacks.

ARSA may receive the message from the ISIL in the Middle East and from other terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda. Even though the ARSA Facebook page was banned by Facebook team, but their propaganda is being distributed on Twitter and YouTube. In order to contribute more, young people may be recruited as new terrorist members, they may also become the best target, not for ARSA but also for international terrorist groups. Myanmar is very concerned about ARSA which may become a part of regional terrorist networks receiving support from global terrorist groups. He expressed that all need to monitor the movement

of ARSA in the region and linkage of international terrorist groups with them. Myanmar security force must pay attention to the potential terrorist actions and security cooperation with Bangladeshi security forces in the border area. In his conclusion, he emphasized that all need to share more information to conduct more cooperation and collaboration, to combat terrorist networks which are endangering the region. Now it is vital to cooperate and collaborate among regional countries to fight against terrorism. With sharing of information, technology and experience, there will be no safe haven in the region for the terrorists, so that all can keep their peaceful environment. Like the rest of the countries in the region, Myanmar believes there must not be any place of terrorism to thrive. He highlighted that Myanmar is very willing to enhance ongoing cooperation and collaboration on counter terrorism with all.



# Presentation – V



**Professor Indrajit Rai**

*Academic Expert, Nepal*

Professor Indrajit Rai, Academic Expert, Nepal stated that effective and timely international cooperation is essential for states to prevent terrorist acts and bring terrorists to justice. He shared that as a landlocked country, Nepal faces security threats that may differ from those suffered by other BIMSTEC states. He reflected on the event of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2001 which is marked as a black chapter in the history of Nepal. On that day the then King Birendra Vikram Shah along with almost his entire family was killed inside of his palace, which was under the security of one brigade of Nepalese Army. The killer is still unknown. Nepal is yet to find out whose grand design it was. Professor Rai questioned whether this incident can be separated from violent extremism activity. He mentioned about few terrorist incidents concerning Nepal. Almost twelve years ago, Islamic extremist had executed twelve Nepalese citizens in Iraq. Twelve years after the horrific incident, another twelve Nepalese were killed when the vehicle they were travelling in was blown up by terrorist in Afghanistan.

Professor Rai then discussed the recent sufferings of Nepal. He stated that throughout 2016, domestic political unrest continued to plague Nepal as members of Madhesi groups from the country's southern Tarai area agitated for amendments to the constitution of Nepal, which was promulgated on September 2015. While the protests were mainly peaceful, agitators sometimes employed violent tactics. Ten years after the 1996-2006 Maoist insurgency, most Maoist factions have joined the legitimate political process, and the Communists Party of Nepal-Maoist Center leads the Nepali government as of late 2016. But some participants of the former Maoist insurgency remained outside of political process and occasionally used violence or threats to meet their objectives. Neither the ethnic protestors in the Tarai nor the Maoist splinter group has any known links to international terrorist groups. He stated that in June 2016, a splinter Maoist group led by Netra Bikram Chand, also known as the Biplav group, used crude incendiary device to destroy cell phone towers in several districts and to attack offices of two international non-governmental organization (INGOs) in Sindhupalchowk and Nuwakot districts of Nepal. In September, another Maoist splinter group was suspected of planting crude improvised explosive devices at a number of Schools in the Kathmandu Valley. Although, Biplov group claims his party is a political party but present government of Nepal has banned all his movements in the country because of their illegal activities against the constitution of Nepal.

Professor Rai cautioned that a serious international terrorist event inside Nepal targeting foreigners would pose new and serious challenges for the Nepal Police and the justice sector and would strain the country's investigative and judicial capacities. Under the current legal regime, a terrorist attack would likely be charged under its constituent crimes, such as murder or arson, while Nepal's anti-money laundering statute would encompass financial support for the offence.

In the context of current terrorist activities and major security challenges for Nepal, Professor Rai referred to the Honorable Prime Minister of Nepal KP Sharma Oli who expressed that ongoing terrorist activities are posing direct challenge to peace, security, economic development and social unity of Nepal. The security agencies should always be prepared to fight against such threats. While Nepal has a specialized unit to investigate and respond to terrorist incidents (Nepal Special Bureau), law enforcement units do not have sufficient modern technical capacities to effectively detect, deter, or identify terrorist suspects. An open border with India and Tribhuvan International Airport security is a real challenge for Nepal. To meet these challenges, Nepali Police officers participated in the Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program. In 2016, the ATA program funded five training courses to improve Counterterrorism capabilities within Nepali law enforcement agencies. More than 100 Nepali officers attended the 2016 ATA courses, which included: terrorism public awareness training consultation, hospital-based management of mass casualty incidents, management of terrorist investigation training and best counter-terrorism practices community policing training etc.

Professor Rai concluded his speech with the hope that this forum would be able to prepare an effective mechanism to strengthen cooperation to tackle terrorism and the rise of violent extremism for peace, stability and economic development in the region.

# Presentation – VI



**Mrs. D.D. Nirasha Nirangani Dissanayake**

*Deputy Director (Policy & Planning), Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka*

At the outset of her presentation, **Mrs. D.D. Nirasha Nirangani Dissanayake**, Deputy Director (Policy & Planning), Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka, provided a definition of extremism which is “Extremism refers to beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to further radical, ideological, religious or political aims”. She added that extremism refers to a common factor creating instability in South Asia. The number of deaths caused in South Asia by extremism is the highest in the world. For years, all the countries of South Asia faced tremendous security challenges from terrorism and violent extremism. She shared some of the experiences with respect to terrorist activities in Sri Lanka. For many years, Sri Lanka suffers from insurrection and Civil War. She mentioned about the 1971 insurrection in Sri Lanka. In order to get worldwide attention, they launched an insurrection against the Sri Lankan government on 5 April 1971. Though the insurgents were young, armed, inadequately trained, they succeeded in capturing major areas of southern and central provinces. Later they were defeated by the elite forces. Insurgents attempted to seize power and created a major crisis for the government and forced a fundamental reassessment of the nation's security needs. They had prepared for the insurrection in the years leading up to the gathering of weapons but had limited access to modern weapons.

She added that in recent years, terrorist groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram have shaped the image of violent extremism and the debate about how to address this threat. Their message of intolerance—religious, cultural, social—has had drastic consequences for many regions of the world. Holding territory and using social media for real-time transmission of their atrocious crimes, they seek to challenge our shared values of peace, justice and human dignity.

She stated that the government of Sri Lanka involved in an armed conflict with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). Beginning from 1983, the war had lasted nearly three decades which is the longest civil war in Asia. After a 26-year military campaign, the Sri Lankan military defeated the Tamil Tigers in May 2009, bringing the civil war to an end. For over 25 years, the war caused significant hardships for the population, environment and the economy of the country, with an initial estimated 80,000–100,000 people killed. After



the civil war, major terrorist act was reported during the Easter Sunday on 21 April 2019. Suicide bombs of the group attacked three churches in Negombo, Batticaloa and Colombo's Kochchikade district and three luxury hotels in Colombo. She informed that 259 people were killed and over five hundred were injured. The Easter Sunday attack was the first act of terrorism that occurred after the end of the civil war in 2009. She noted that Sri Lanka used military approach to defeat the LTTE but it has to think of another approach to eliminate the extremism. Thus, she also proposed several recommendations to eliminate terrorism and violent extremism.

- Need to strengthen and empower the moderate voices within all communities.
- Need to examine issues of extremism in a broader geographical context and not in an isolated manner.
- Need to work on common international mechanisms for counter terrorism rather than isolated and domestic mechanisms.
- Need to harvest and nurture state-sponsored interfaith inter-ethnic collective groups to promote harmony
- Need to examine how extremist group is funded.
- Need to ensure ethnic violence is addressed swiftly and surely as this has a direct impact on the economy.
- Need to restructure the Sri Lankan education system.
- Need for educational institutions to promote social harmony and cultural awareness.
- To encourage religious leaders to unite and preach a common narrative of peace and coexistence.
- Need to ensure that the domestic laws are relevant and there is counter terrorism-related legislations are comprehensive.



- Need to introduce a new policy or legislation including,
  - Anti-Hate Speech Act
  - Intelligence Services act
  - Prevention of Terrorism Act
- Need to view extremism on a broader contextual framework by examining interconnected factors such as narcotics trafficking and arms dealing by strengthening the legal system.
- Need to launch a state-financed initiative in social media to promote national harmony and combat hate/fake news.
- Need for increased monitoring of travel to global extremists hotspots.
- To establish an Integrated Threat Assessment Centre. (This will enhance information sharing and integrated intelligence analysis by bringing together various departments and agencies under one roof).
- Need for further open and free discussions through all levels of the executive particularly about religion and radicalization.
- Need to understand and secure the cyber domain including introducing social media policies and surveillance to counter violent extremism.

In conclusion, she told that terrorism and extremism are common factors creating instability not in BIMSTEC countries alone but in countries worldwide. In this context, sharing information and experiences are immensely important. Therefore, we need to work together by bringing our people under one roof. Sri Lanka will be more than happy to take part in any initiatives that promote peace, stability, prosperity and reconciliation.

# Presentation – VII



**Mr Arthit Thongin**

*Lecturer, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand*

Mr Arthit Thongin, Lecturer, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand highlighted the importance of 9/11 attacks and said that it defined the international politics. He noted that many scholars use 9/11 events as cut off era of international politics. They named the world after that catastrophe – the post 9/11 world. It means that terrorism and counter terrorism have emerged as main agenda and conversation of international politics. It has been about two decades since that day and the international community has spent much time and resources for fighting terrorism which seems to be not vanishing from global security agenda – even though the world has achieved more effective instruments and techniques to counter the problem. He said that this kind of feedback outcome implicitly encourages scholars to scrutinize not only the approach that has been used but also the way the essence of terrorism issue has been defined.

Mr Thongin opined that using the 9/11 event as time line of world era may not be a good idea because what the world is seeing today is a syndrome of disease that has developed from the past. He then gave some examples such as the origins of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Indonesia can be traced back to the day of independence proclamation in 1945. Many of political Islamic activists on that day dreamed about designing the new emerging sovereign state with a religious flavour. However, more or less, the Orde Baru (New Order) of President Suharto (1966-1998) pushed them to form the armed groups. Similarly, some groups of Patani Merdeka (Independence) advocacy both violent perpetrators and nonviolent activists claim their right to self-determination by referring to the unfair border demarcation between Siam and British in the Treaty of 1909.

Hence, according to Mr Thongin, an understanding of the History of terrorism is one of the crucial conditions for designing the approach coping with terrorist threat. For many contexts, it is found that the root cause of existing violence is a set of political problem which cannot be solved in the normal social condition. It is a protracted conflict that has exploited and pushed some people to believe in fighting by violent means. Thus, in his opinion, the political problem must be carefully resolved by political means, not military means. Hence, terrorism problem, at its essence, is 'Political'.

Mr Thongin said that the international community spends about two decades for developing various measures under the 'Counter Paradigm' – which could only restrain the symptom of disease named terrorism. The examples of those measures are the sharing system of information between intelligence units, the special law which enhance government authority in inspection and investigation, developing security technology in the airport, developing course of crisis management exercise and so on. All of them can be called the 'Counter Terrorism Approach' or CT. Surely, those measures are not meaningless. But they are not enough for solving the problem sustainably. The weak point of CT approach is that it only helps us to limit the freedom of movement of terrorist actors. Nevertheless, there is a need for another approach which would help to diagnose and cure the root causes of terrorism.

He mentioned about the UN plan of action on terrorism. On 15th January 2016, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations presented a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism to the General Assembly. It could be counted as the first official promotion in the global context about new approach coping with terrorism threat. The approach considerably focuses on the fundamental basis of ideas which support violent means in politics.

Mr Thongin then talked about the differences between violent extremism (VE) and extremism. He said that VE means personal beliefs that support ideological violent actions aimed to reach their radical political goals. However, one must distinguish between the extreme ideas and the violent means. The extremism or extreme idea is a conceptual view aimed to change some fundamental values of society radically. He said that the extreme idea is not a threat or bad thing for political society by itself. In fact, there are many extremists who contributed to a social change in positive direction such as the campaign for women rights in America in the past.

Thus, in his opinion, the root cause of terrorism problem is not extremism. Instead, it is the way or means people choose or are conditioned to choose for reaching their political goals. The Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) is an approach that lay itself on this kind of view. It focuses on designing various measures which are non-coercive measures to address the root cause of terrorism.

Mr Thongin said that PCVE is an approach that supplements the CT approach – but different in principles and functions. The CT approach pays attention to limiting freedom of terrorist activities with state apparatus, especially security forces, while the PCVE approach aims to design the participatory programmes between stakeholders addressing the motivations that drive people to violent ways of fighting. In other words, the CT approach concentrates much at the actor level of problem, while the PCVE approach focuses much on the structural level such as injustice and inequality. So, he called the CT approach as a Traditional Approach or Hard Approach. And he named the PCVE as New Approach or Soft Approach.

He then focused on his own research work on the issues. He said that the design of National Action Plan (NAP) of PCVE is the evidence-based task to localize the relevant principles. For his operational research in case of Thailand, its first phase starts with revealing two initial sets of information which are the basis for drafting a NAP in next step. First, he is going to launch the project about mapping related stakeholders in each region of the country. This will start next month. Second, he will define the potential driving motivations of violent extremist recruitment based mainly on the push and pull factors.

Mr Thongin said that in each country, the phase of mapping stakeholders related with the NAP is different. In case of Thailand, he began with setting a primary criterion for classifying the collected data into at least four groups of stakeholders: potential violent actors, targeted audiences, influencers and potential change



agents. It should be noted that the state agencies would be counted as an important part of stakeholders which is needed to be assessed in this project.

However, the stakeholders mapping should be made incorporating at least two important approaches. The first one is 'Gender Approach'. He said that it is important to reflect the gender view clearly in the drafting of NAP. The second approach involves the 'Civil Society Partnership Approach'. He said that one of the most key success factors to cope with terrorism by applying PCVE approach is stakeholder's comprehensive participation, especially collaboration between state and the CSOs.

He noted that the primary framework of his research project is the push and pull factors. The push factor means structural conditions that push some people to become the new face of violent extremists. The examples are social marginalization, inequality, perception about discrimination, corruption, unemployment and ineffective public governance. It should be noted that the push factors may be abstraction. But many people perceive them through some direct experience in daily life such as they saw their father has been killed by state agency illegally. This kind of experience could be called the 'Trigger Event'. The pull factor means a psychological catalyst that attracts people to join in the violent extremist movement by exploiting the existence of oppressive structural condition. The examples of pull factors are collective identity consciousness, higher social status and recognition from community, and simple narrative available to explain the complex problems people face. In addition, some scholars define the push factors as structural motivators and define the pull factors as individual motivators. Both of them play important role in the PCVE approach. He concluded highlighting the importance of the PCVE approach once again, since it helps to solve the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism.

# Presentation - VIII



**Mr M Ashique Rahman**

*Research Fellow,  
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Bangladesh*

Mr M Ashique Rahman, Research Fellow, BISS, Bangladesh in his deliberation focused on the role and importance of intelligence in countering violent extremism and terrorism. The importance derives from the fact that whenever there is a terrorist incident in any country there has always been a claim either rightfully or erroneously about an intelligence failure. That particular aspect has serious implications for public opinion about the incident, for public perception and public trust in the government and law enforcement agencies. Moreover, there has often been some sort of media manipulation of that particular intelligence failure claim in some respect that led to some sort of blame game among the policy makers and the intelligence community.

By stressing on the importance of intelligence sharing in this age of transnational movement and free flow of information, he suggested that the regional countries need to cooperate in terms of sharing intelligence and best practices as well as capacity building of each other countries of the region. He also noted that there have been a number of initiatives under the BIMSTEC framework. Bangladesh as a founding member of BIMSTEC remains committed to all the initiatives. Moreover, BIMSTEC has Convention on Countering Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) and there have been negotiations going on for a convention on Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) in Criminal Matters. He laid emphasis on the fact that, it has been a long time since the CTTC convention was adopted in 2009. Ten years have passed and BIMSTEC countries have not yet been able to ratify it. The member states appear less active for its enforcement and the same thing might happen with respect to MLA. In conclusion, he recommended immediate enforcement of the CTTC convention and the MLA Convention, thereby, making these two important instruments of BIMSTEC cooperation in the sector of countering terrorism and transnational crime functional as quickly as possible.

# Open Discussion



**Salahuddin Ahmad**, Member, Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission stated that he was not very convinced by the findings and presentations particularly from the Indian friends. He agreed with Hermant Harishchandra Kotalwar that different variants of Islam is found every part of the world like in India. He believed that in this forum and also elsewhere deep argument over different system of Islam is true and universal. However, he suggested that Bhaktamar and Islamic Sufism should be clear to all and accepted in the region and also in the universe. Moreover, there is a need to be very serious about this point rather than merely thinking about it.

**Dr A. S. M. Ali Ashraf**, Associate Professor, Dept. of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh asked the Indian delegate about what the challenges are there in regional cooperation in intelligence sharing between countries. Then he asked the Myanmar delegate, since ARSA has been depicted as a terrorist group in their presentation and they have also highlighted the links between them and the external actors, if they thought that there was any link of domestic determinants such as grievances and long standing oppression as the reason behind ARSA's activities. And if yes, what would be the possible remedies for that.



**Response:** The Indian delegate responded that the main challenge is that every country has their own understanding on what terrorism is, and there is ongoing work at the international level so that there can be a common understanding and framework about what terrorism means. One man's freedom fighter can be another country's terrorist. so, the main challenge in terms of intelligence sharing is the level of distrust among countries. If the countries do not trust each other, they cannot share intelligence.

**Police Colonel Naing Ye Thu**, Division against Transnational Crime, Head of Enforcement Department, Ministry of Home Affairs, Myanmar said that there might be many root causes of them becoming terrorist, but as a law enforcing officer, he did not have the capacity to respond to them, so he only focused his presentation on confronting the terrorism.

**Laphai Zau Goone**, Member, Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS) said that the problem facing now is a result of long historical events and there is no black and white answer to the situation. He added that they had come to the meeting in hopes of talking with the other participants and taking recommendations back to Myanmar.





**Brig Gen M Sakhawat Hussain, ndc, psc (retd)**, Former Commissioner of Bangladesh Election Commission expressed some of his observations and comments. He noted that the region had the experience of SAARC which was more or less non-functioning. The problem is that all is talking about terrorism focusing on only Islamic terrorism. There are other religious terrorisms also which are coming up, for example in Myanmar Ma Ba Tha is seen. They may not directly involve in extremist violence, but they are the cause of spread of extremism, particularly in the Rakhine state. Similarly, Sri Lanka had been a very peaceful country, but is facing rising Buddhist power force Bodu Bala Sena (BBS). India has been a very secular country for long time, but it cannot be said now for the reasons and causes present there which probably draw many people into extremism. He suggested that people need to do soul searching, if BIMSTEC has to survive, it has to look at what is going wrong within themselves. Moreover, there is a need to find a solution to the Rohingya crisis. Without that the cooperation that is being asked for from other neighbouring states will not come that soon. They have to settle down by reconciling with their own citizenship, otherwise it will pose a big threat in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean region.

cooperation that is being asked for from other neighbouring states will not come that soon. They have to settle down by reconciling with their own citizenship, otherwise it will pose a big threat in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean region.

**Dr Delwar Hossain**, Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh gave an overview of the current trend of religious extremism in different BIMSTEC countries. He mentioned that soul searching was required for the countries in order to find what is going wrong within themselves. He opined that if BIMSTEC has to survive, the issue of Rohingya has to be settled. Without reconciliation and settlement of this issue, the cooperation that is being asked from the member countries would not be possible. If the differences are not resolved soon, it would lead to a big problem which would develop in the conjunction of Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean region. The silent symptoms are there, so it was crucial to settle this issue.



**Mr Shahab Enam Khan**, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh highlighted several points based on the discussion of the participants. First, Bangladesh for last forty-seven years advocated for multilateralism as it believes in collective cooperation and collective security. Henceforth, Bangladesh focuses on the idea of peace and prospect. The very simple reason is one country cannot prosper alone rather one has to prosper in connection with others. He inferred that this is the hardcore reality of geography and BIMSTEC is the output of that. Second important point is ethno-religious politics. It has been there for centuries. He added that the politics of Rohingya, politics of anarchy and politics of Lashkar-e-Taiba all have come up with an ethno-religious political baggage which has ethnic, political and religious lineage. Thus, the whole discourse cannot be isolated from that. For this reason, it is very important to realize the way to disconnect this and make the multilateral platform functional. Third, stigmatization or pointing towards any specific religion. In everyday and every morning from different newspapers it is found that something is happening in Mumbai, Islamabad, Yangon, Rakhine, Chattogram and Cox's Bazar. These things cannot be solved by one country alone because there is a linkage between transnational entities. Thus, the response should be transnational too. Moreover, there is a need to cooperate rather than stigmatizing and educating people about religion. In addition, there is a need to educate rather than only saying that Sufism comes from here and Buddhism comes from there. Fourth, whether it is only religion and transnational issue or the failure of the state and where is the internal dynamics of terrorism. If it is the failure of the state then there is something to be done as Bangladesh has phenomenal experience in disaster



management. He suggested that Myanmar can bring those phenomenal experiences and expertise and make those experiences functional to their country. He also added that Bangladesh has done phenomenal activities in terms of counter-terrorism. In this respect, he asked Myanmar delegates why are they not replicating Bangladesh's measures and why are they not coming and cooperating with Bangladesh? He also pointed out that India and Bangladesh are successfully cooperating with each other in countering terrorism. As a result, in this forum both countries present a successful model for everyone to replicate and cooperate. Moreover, BIMSTEC gives the countries of the region a particular platform therefore; no one should be left alone. He also raised the question whether the existence of ARSA called for sending seven hundred and sixty thousand people out of their homes. If that was the case then why the Kashmiris are sitting in the Kashmir and the Syrians are sitting in Syria. In this respect, he recommended working together and helping each other and building the finest possible experiences of the state-of-the-art technology that they had acquired. As for example, India has sophistication in cyber security, space technology, disaster management and Myanmar has drastically reduced its opium cultivation which is making Myanmar as a global player in setting global norms. Thus, BIMSTEC should focus more on global standards and setting global norms.



# Remarks by the Chair



**Professor Dr Imtiaz Ahmed**

*Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh*

Professor Dr Imtiaz Ahmed, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh flagged a couple of things in his closing remarks. South Asians are not good at building political institutions and that is precisely the reason it was ruled for nearly thousand years by the outsiders. The last big empire it had was the Chadragupta Mauriya in 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., which was indigenous and they ruled for only 136 years. After that it was 1947. He always makes fun with his students that the oldest institution of South Asia is the sweet shop, Moronchad Grandsons. The region's love for gastronomy is enormous. They are good at food making, but not as political persons. That is the limitation and the weakness, and precisely the reason why SAARC could not function and for 22 years BIMSTEC is also limping. One of the reasons for which BIMSTEC remains weak is that an organization cannot be built on negativity. There has to be a positive element of having an organization. BIMSTEC unfortunately is built on two negatives. One definitely has been keeping Pakistan out, which is the reason of SAARC getting stranded. Second one is to keep China out. He opined that the second one cannot be done.

The acronym of BIMSTEC says technical and economic cooperation. But suddenly security has been brought in, which means it is not sure about its aim. If it is technical and economic cooperation, he sees no reason why China should not be a member. All the countries of South Asia as a single country trading regime have close ties with China that includes India as well. In terms of development partners, bulk of countries' first priority will be China. So, he opined that there is a need to change its body language and mindset. So, he made a humble request to BIMSTEC to assume positive attitude and then start contemplating how to move forward.

Looking at what to do with terrorism and why there is terrorism, he highlighted that in the World Terrorism Index, three countries of South Asia are in the first 10, i.e., Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Looking at the first 20, there is the United States. Bangladesh is in 25th position, whereas Thailand and Philippines are also in the first 20. But then again, Bangladesh has a very negative image. He mentioned some figures

of 2012 to give all a sense of whether the people are doing the right thing. In 2012, throughout the world, 56 million people died due to various reasons. Out of that, 620,000 died out of human related violence. Out of that, 500,000 died due to crime related violence and 120,000 died due to war. Thus, war killed less people than crime related violence, so lot of people is saying that money should go the police and not to the military. People died due to diabetes were 1.3 million. 7,697 people died because of suicide terrorism whereas 800,000 people committed suicide in 2012. Hence, more people committed suicide than dying of war and crime related violence. He had a statistic of 2013 only of the US, which shows that only gun related suicide was 21,175, that means every day in the US 58 people die due to gun related suicide. He explained the reason that why 7,697 deaths of terrorize all to such an extent that there is a need of having a conference here at the table. Those were not voluntary suicide. 800,000 suicides were all in developed countries – Lithuania, South Korea, Japan, France, Switzerland and New Zealand were the top countries. No sub-Saharan Africa or underdeveloped countries - they have much less suicide rates. India for some reason is climbing up, but on the whole, bulks of them were from developed countries. He then quoted a remark by Ibn Rusld, “ignorance creates fear, fear creates intolerance and intolerance creates violence”. Once the fear gets into head, as also mentioned by Carl Gustav Jung, it becomes hereditary.

He gave answer to the question that why South Asia is so fearful. Bangladesh suffered two genocides in 1947 and in 1971. Now it is suffering from the third genocide which took place actually in the Arakan, but people ended up in Bangladesh. So, it can be said that Bangladesh has suffered three genocides. A region which has such a traumatized kind of history, fear gets into its head. This is where work needs to be done. BIMSTEC has to work on how to get the fear out of the region. Sri Lanka is a case where there is fear in the relationship between the Tamils, the Sinhalese and the Muslims. They need to work much harder otherwise it is going to bounce back. It is seen in Europe and in the US that how it impacted their society. They have not addressed the issue of fear from the point it ought to have. Here is the opportunity of BIMSTEC to work on this.

There are two big theories of how to reproduce institutions and make a better living. One is the theory of scarcity and it is mainly because bulks of the ideas of the policy makers are done by the economists. Looking into the whole discourse of economics, it can be observed that it has emerged from scarcity, as one has to manage the scarce resources. Problem with that approach is: if one starts working on scarcity, fear has to get into the head and that's the problem. In reproducing something good, which economists tried to do, but since it is fundamentally based on scarcity and fear, it ended up becoming more inclusive and not an exclusive one.

The other big theory is the theory of abundance. The best example he had is of the European Union which followed the theory of abundance. That is why the Brexit is suffering, as Britain had entered the EU much later as a result of scarcity but not of abundance. The Europeans started with coal and steel and they had that in abundance. France and Germany will remain together as they are stuck in that abundance. That's how the EU flourished in a way. SAARC unfortunately started with scarcity, focusing on trade, which is the most scarce resource it had.

So, he believed that BIMSTEC has an opportunity to learn from the failures and accept those in intellectual ways. It should not follow the theory of scarcity and should not start with connectivity and trade. The first thing needs to be done is to go with the abundance. One such thing is the human beings; it has

1.5 billion people and that is why there is need to invest and to start with the mindset full of intellect and education. BIMSTEC should start working having MoUs with all the universities that is possible. It should start trying to interact, allow the students to interact in a way where they can be in the same classroom wherever they are. It is possible because we have now the technology to do that. BIMSTEC needs to work together and launch a BIMSTEC satellite so that they can have a kind of technology where the entire BIMSTEC intellectual fold can be brought in and can have a virtual BIMSTEC university. BIMSTEC is simply trying to replicate the SAARC or other organizations. He is afraid that this will not go too far. As human beings it is the responsibility of all that how they want to shape this world 100 years from now, not 10 years. In the Mahabharata, Yudhishtira was asked a very simple question that what the greatest wonder is. He answered by saying that "death strikes each day, but we live as if we are immortal". Thus, BIMSTEC is an opportunity for all to carry forward to a state where it deals with human beings forgetting all the baggage that it has, at least for once.



# Working Session – II

## Maritime Security (Capacity Building, Maritime Connectivity, etc.)

The Second Working Session was the third session of the first day. It was entitled “**Maritime Security (Capacity Building, Maritime Connectivity, etc.)**”. In this session, presentations were made by Professor Dr Rashed uz Zaman, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh; Moutusi Islam, Research Officer, BIISS, Bangladesh; Mr Tenzin Tenzin, Desk Officer, Department of SAARC and Regional Organization, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bhutan; Amruta Karambelkar, Research Assistant, Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), India; Professor Indrajit Rai, Academic Expert, Nepal; Mrs Sudharma Karunarathna, Assistant Secretary (Defence), Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka and Mrs Sumalee Sukdanont, Senior Researcher, Transportation Institute, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. The session was chaired by Rear Admiral M Khaled Iqbal, BSP, ndc, psc, Vice Chancellor, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University (BSMRMU), Bangladesh.



# Presentation - I



**Professor Dr Rashed uz Zaman**

*Department of International Relations  
University of Dhaka, Bangladesh*

Professor Dr Rashed uz Zaman, Department of International Relations University of Dhaka, Bangladesh started with a very simple premise that “We, with our lives are like islands in the oceans, but connected in the deep”. In other words, all are living in a world where humanity is increasingly setting divisive tones. He brought an example looking at the US and other parts of the world, where the concept of “wall” is coming up promoted by President Donald Trump in a big way. The wall which is going to be built at the American-Mexican border is also going to have impact on butterflies i.e., on ecology. Eventually, this will have a cascading effect. For that reason he started with this very simple explanation to make all understand that whenever the ocean is looked upon, it is to be understood as a whole and it is needed to have a holistic approach while dealing with the problems of the ocean.

The BIMSTEC has littorals and all of them are in the Indian Ocean region. So, the question arises that why this particular region is so important. During the Pax Americana, the Atlantic was very important; but that is now changing particularly since big geopolitical and geoeconomic changes are taking place in the world. So, Indian Ocean cannot be neglected any longer. It has many problems and the big one is maritime terrorism. The issue of maritime terrorism and piracy originated particularly in 1985, which prevails in this region as well. The terrorists do not confine in any particular lands and they have stakes in the sea which needs to be taken into consideration.

Piracy has become a very big issue and it has importance in the whole region of Indian Ocean including Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and others. The ships carry goods and thus, they often become targets of the pirates. Problems in the sea are not only confined to the sea, anyone who has studied piracy should understand that the pirates originate from disorder in the land. It is seen that their economic livelihood is usually shattered and they have no political representation. But they have to survive and out of no choice they go out to the sea and become pirates.

So, the problems in the land and in the sea are connected, and according to Prof. Zaman, this should be the premise as per the conference is concerned. Since the 1980s, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) started collecting data regarding piracy systematically at the Horn of Africa and on the West Coast of Africa. The pirates are enemies of humanity and countries need to come together and deal with it. How to deal with the Somali pirates became a classic example, where the countries from all over the world came together and they created a taskforce which was able to deal with the problem successfully. But the problem has not gone away as it lies within the land. The rise of this problem has been also seen in the Southeast Asian region. So, maritime piracy and maritime terrorism have connections which need to be taken care of. This is one of the very important things while talking about factors affecting maritime security in the Bay of Bengal region.

He indicated to the increasing number of piracy incidents at the Somalian coast in the years of 2015 to 2017. He commented that there is no way to be complacent about piracy, particularly in this region. Transnational crimes that is the unholy trinity of human smuggling, arms smuggling and drug trafficking had been happening all over South Asia and Southeast Asia as well. Bay of Bengal particularly in the Indian Ocean suffers from this malice. He showed a quick glance of the Bay's maritime trafficking scenario which took place in the Indian Ocean region and the various groups that are involved in it.

He then stated that the environment is changing and everyone needs to understand its impact. This is a problem which cannot be faced by a single country. All of the Indian Ocean littorals are going to be severely affected by the sea level rise as the temperature goes up, which will have impacts on the fishing stocks and livelihood. At present, Indian Ocean is the home to 70 per cent of all heat taken up by global oceans during the past decade. So, the effects of climate change are going to be drastic. It is the time to find out ways to deal with this problem.

The issue of maritime resources is also very important. The impact of climate change demonstrates that the fishstocks will no longer be like before. As the scarcity hits, more people will resort to illegal fishing and the ways to cope with these challenges need to be thought of. In 2016, the New York Times published a series of fascinating articles on the problems of sea all over the world. They talked about human trafficking, drugs, ships pollution, etc. One very important case was they talked about a ship and how this ship created havoc in the world fisheries stock. The name of the ship was The Andrey Dolgov, or STS-50 or Sea Breez as it also sometimes called itself, had been plundering all the oceans of their most valuable living resource—fish, often also termed as 'White Gold. It is thought to have been operating from over 10 years in the Strait of Malacca area. It is estimated to have looted up to US \$50m (£38m) worth of fish from the oceans. Eventually the ship was tracked down but it operated under a number of flags—starting from Japanese to Korean to Cambodian flags and created false tracks of identity all over the world. Finally, it was caught by the Indonesian authority, who seized and destroyed 488 illegal fishing vessels since 2014. While dealing with problems at the sea, one singular country cannot solve the problem.

There have been talks about “free seas for everyone”, but the problems are: bifurcation of the region into different sub-regions; symmetry in asymmetry, i.e. differences in administrative or governance mechanisms; security outlook; inter-state disputes and an array of problems that require state and non-state actors cooperation. These are the realities while talking about problems that BIMSTEC is facing.

He highlighted some important things such as geography-centric views must be avoided particularly when talking about the oceans. All are living in a difficult and interconnected world, so problems cannot be confined into geographical locations. Think globally but act regionally and locally is another thing to be kept in mind. While talking about maritime security, it is not only talking about 'security' but also 'defense' and 'safety'. Preventive and responsive measures are also very important.

He concluded by saying that people should not forget that they live in one world. The rest of the world cannot proceed leaving any area underdeveloped. He delivered a question to all in the forum that what the difference between heaven and hell was. He answered by referring to a gentleman who was given a tour to heaven and hell and a choice between these two. He went to hell first and saw food and everything was there, but the problem was the inhabitants of hell had long arms and legs. So, they were not able to feed themselves and which lead to starvation and sufferings. He saw the same reality in the heaven but the only difference was the people realized they need to cooperate with each other. Despite having long arms, they were feeding each other and in that way peace came to heaven. This is something worth remembering while talking about problems in the maritime domain.



# Presentation - II



**Moutusi Islam**

*Research Officer,  
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Bangladesh*

**Moutusi Islam**, Research Officer, BISS, Bangladesh in her presentation titled, “Towards a Sustainable Bay of Bengal Blue Economy” stated that Bay of Bengal, the largest bay in the world is home to one-fourth of the world population and half a billion people live directly on its coastal rim relies extensively on the marine resources for livelihood and food security. However, the growing pressures on ocean resources have created the need to increase cooperation towards conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources as outlined in the goal 14 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this context, the concept of blue economy bears the significance.

In discussing the conceptual aspect of blue economy, she noted that while economist Gunter Pauli introduced a new idea of sustainable development involving ocean resources and termed it blue economy in 1994, the idea did not gain currency until it was picked up at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development popularly known as Rio+20 Summit in 2012. So far, no commonly accepted definition has emerged. Diversity of views is noteworthy. In 2015, Jennifer J. Silver, Noella Gray and Lisa Campbell in their article titled “Blue Economy and the Competing Discourses in International Ocean Governance”, have identified four dominant discourses through which the blue economy is interpreted. The first discourse is “oceans as natural capital” which focuses on environmental protection and restoration and is largely favoured by environmental Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). Second, the “oceans as livelihoods” lens focuses on food security and poverty alleviation, and is largely favoured by Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and development organizations. Third, the “oceans as good business” lens focuses on economic growth and is largely favoured by large and emerging global economies as well as the private sector. Finally, the “oceans as drivers of innovation” lens focuses on research and development, investment, and monitoring which is largely favoured by government and industry groups. So, blue economy is the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, while preserving the health of marine and coastal ecosystems.

Study of numerous documents shows that there are approximately 26 sectors that have been listed under the blue economy. However, she primarily talked about five sectors that are relevant for BIMSTEC member states. First, fisheries and related industries are critical in ensuring food security and employment of the region. There are over 400,000 fishing boats operating in the area and over 4.5 million people are employed in fisheries and associated activities. But the fisheries of the Bay of Bengal have been under pressure for decades and are now severely depleted due to Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. Second, the seaport and maritime transport sector is one of the important priority sectors under the blue economy. However, the member states face challenges in regards to congestion, new information technology and equipment, improvement of port infrastructure and professional services. The third area is offshore hydrocarbons and seabed minerals. Nevertheless, the challenge is that the member states have limited data on the resources their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) possesses and lack capacity for exploration. The fourth area is renewable ocean energy but the problem is lack of feasibility study in this area. Finally, marine tourism with its related marine activities is a growing industry with a challenge of lack of sustainable tourism.

She then briefly discussed about the initiatives undertaken by the member states of BIMSTEC in regards to blue economy. Among the BIMSTEC countries, Bangladesh is perhaps most vocal about blue economy. Since 2014, it hosted numerous conferences and workshops to generate ideas and awareness on blue economy. It has established “Blue Economy Cell” to coordinate blue economy initiatives across sectoral ministries. The country is emphasizing the construction of maritime infrastructure at sea. Prioritizing marine scientific research and education, it has established a Maritime University, Bangladesh Oceanographic Research Institute (BORI) and Bangladesh Institute of Maritime Research and Development (BIMRAD). The Indian government has endorsed the blue economy, and the focus is on the enhancement of existing capacity. India is currently at the process of developing its maritime infrastructure as well as its inland waterways and coastal shipping through the “Sagarmala Programme” which aims to revolutionize maritime logistics and port led developments in the country. The Sri Lankan government has endorsed the blue economy and the political leadership has time and again projected Sri Lanka’s intention to promote the concept at multilateral forums. Sri Lanka has identified a number of key areas which are being given high priority. It has set up the Centre of Excellence on Ocean Sciences as well as Environment to promote the blue economy. In Myanmar, the government has formulated the ocean space management plan and a “Coastal Resources Management Committee” with aims to maintain livelihoods that rely on the sea and protect marine areas. In Thailand, the government has committed to creating a “Blue Economy Zone” with integrated land and ocean based development, applying integrated coastal management (ICM) policies. One thing that is important that blue growth is not just for coastal states. Landlocked countries like Nepal are also focusing on rivers, lakes and other water bodies for blue economic growth. Nepal has adopted certain measures to curb issues of degradation in the water resources. They have taken measures for eco-friendly tourism.

She provided certain recommendations for achieving sustainable Bay of Bengal blue economy. First, developing a consistent definition and a suitable accounting framework for measuring the contribution of blue economy to the overall economy of the BIMSTEC countries is needed. Second, it is necessary to formulate and strengthen legal frameworks to better integrate blue economy considerations. BIMSTEC can devise an internal code of conduct and best practices to regulate fisheries and protect the bay from overfishing. Besides, development of environmental policies and regulations geared towards conserving,

managing, protecting and sustainable use of aquatic and marine ecosystems are necessary as well. Third, prioritizing higher education and better research facilities is essential. BIMSTEC countries may explore the possibility of establishing national and regional funds for research and innovation. Finally, developing blue economy institutional framework is required as well. In this regard, Ms Islam proposed that the member states could think of establishing “BIMSTEC Blue Economy Centre” which would: a) create and manage blue economy related data-base relevant to the region; b) act as a medium of networking among the national level institutions as well as ensure coordination with other BIMSTEC Centres; c) prepare the groundwork, such as feasibility studies, data collection, etc., for intra- BIMSTEC Blue economy related projects; and d) enhance cooperation for capacity building and sharing of experiences. She informed the audience that member states decided to establish an Inter-governmental Expert Group to develop an action plan on blue economy in the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit last year. So, leaders of BIMSTEC have already emphasized the importance of blue economy which is definitely a positive sign.

In conclusion, she said that maritime security and blue economy are two sides of the same coin. Without a sufficient degree of security, ocean resources cannot be developed. At the same time, lack of ocean governance can lead to maritime security issues. BIMSTEC could certainly take the lead on ocean governance and blue economy activities which is necessary for prosperous and sustainable Bay of Bengal region.

# Presentation - III



**Mr Tenzin Tenzin**

*Desk Officer, Department of SAARC and Regional Organization,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bhutan*

Mr Tenzin Tenzin, Desk Officer, Department of SAARC and Regional Organization, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bhutan noted that Bhutan being a landlocked country, issues related to maritime security are not directly relevant for the country. However, Bhutan has been taking note of developments related to maritime security in the region and they do recognize that it is increasingly becoming important for Bhutan to deliberate on such domain if it is seeking to achieve the common aspirations of the BIMSTEC member states for regional progress and prosperity.

In this regard, he brought our attention to the ongoing debates by different scholars and academicians on giving a proper definition of maritime security ranging from inter-state disputes, maritime terrorism, piracy, trafficking of narcotics, people and illicit goods, arms proliferation, illegal fishing, environmental crime, to that of the recent approach of linking maritime security to “economic” or “blue growth.” Therefore, he urged the esteemed delegates from other member states to deliberate on such issues because understanding these concepts have a beneficial function since, they allow actors to effectively coordinate their action and proceed in joint activities while simultaneously disagreeing over local meanings.

Mr Tenzin then talked about some concepts to assess the relationship between the concept of maritime security in relation to other concepts such as: (1) sea power (role of ships in protecting the core sea lines of communication in order to facilitate trade and economic prosperity in the region); (2) marine safety (safety of ships and maritime installation with a primary purpose of protecting maritime professionals and marine environment); (3) blue economy and blue growth (linking and integrating the different dimensions of the economic development of the oceans and constructing sustainable management strategies for food security and resilience of coastal populations); and (4) human resilience (food, shelter, sustainable livelihoods and safe employment).

Finally, he stated that it is important to understand the concept of maritime security in the region and develop a framework to provide a basis for scrutinizing what member states need to include and exclude in their concept of maritime security. Such discourse will definitely help countries in building BIMSTEC as a strong and vibrant regional organization.



# Presentation - IV



**Amruta Karambelkar**

*Research Assistant,  
Vivekanand International Foundation (VIF), India*

Amruta Karambelkar, Research Assistant, Vivekanand International Foundation (VIF), India began her presentation by saying that BIMSTEC has emerged as a great priority area for India. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi there is a reframing of India's foreign policy with increased dynamism and commitment to deliver. As the 6<sup>th</sup> largest economy and the 4<sup>th</sup> largest military in the world, India is recognized as a major power and international community expects India to play a greater role in global affairs, which India is keen to play. Its foreign policy still follows the principle of strategic autonomy and peaceful coexistence.

Ms Karambelkar shared that as India continues to grow and lives of its citizens improve, India's desire to rise should also be beneficial to its neighbours. A strong, stable and prosperous neighbourhood is of India's interest. India's policy towards its maritime neighbours is rightly termed as SAGAR i.e, Security and Growth for All. Indian Navy has identified Indian Ocean as its primary focus area. Indian Ocean is critical to India's development and security. The Bay of Bengal is in the northern range of the Indian Ocean. The Bay surrounds the eastern flank of the Indian peninsula which makes it a part of India's Act East policy. Being a maritime entity, the Bay of Bengal has numerous challenges, characteristic of any maritime space. But the positive side is that there is no maritime territorial conflict like in other parts of the world. Whatever disputes have been there between India and Bangladesh have been resolved as per the law. However, she expressed that it is a region of abundant opportunity and challenges. She shared that all countries of BIMSTEC are driven by the goal of economic development and prosperity. As the world becomes globalized and as the centre of economic activities is pivoted around Asia, this is the right time for all the countries to harness it. BIMSTEC members must strive for economic integration in line with ASEAN. The first area could be the Bay of Bengal free trade and services agreement and members should aim at the conclusion of it at the earliest.

All maritime countries talk about harnessing the potential of oceans for economic development. India has initiated the policy of 'Sagarmala' that is aimed at development and port modernization. It also aims for seamless connectivity to and fro from its port. It aims at developing multimodal connectivity. The driving factor behind this thought is that the focus should be on the development and one should not be restricted by mode

of transportation. She stated that along with 'Sagarmala', the government of India is also encouraging fisheries by providing financial support. She believed that there is a wider trust over ocean economy under the current government.

Ms Karambelkar deliberated that BIMSTEC members are focusing on development through their oceans and looking at infrastructures. India understands that no policy of economic development can proceed without physical infrastructure. But often countries do not have the finances to support it. Many a time, country enters into an arrangement where a piece of land is leased out as a repayment measure. Such practices create a dangerous situation of debt trap which is not in the interest of any country. Infrastructure projects cannot turn into a security problem. National sensitivity is to be taken into account.

Next, she highlighted specific security issues of maritime security which are non-traditional in nature. She stated that the Bay is prone to regular cyclone and causes destruction of life and property. The Indian coasts face cyclones each year. Previously, it used to have devastating effect but Indian administration has learned from the past and taken proactive measures. It has been aided by better forecasting and timely measures and better coordination among agencies. India's response to disaster relief and humanitarian assistance has improved by leaps and bounds, not only domestically but also overseas as evident in India's operations in West Asia. Ms Karambelkar expressed that India would be willing to share its practices among the BIMSTEC member states. There could be workshop and training programmes on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR) among concerned agencies of member states.

Highlighting on the Blue economy, she opined that blue economy is a prevalent developmental theme among maritime nations. It is loosely understood as economic development through the harnessing of the ocean. But unlike its predecessors which are brown economy and green economy, the concept of blue economy has intrinsically woven around the concept of sustainability. Maritime nations have used seas for food, trade and resources for centuries. But now attention needs to be drawn on the issue of sustainability. Sustainable development is going to be a big challenge for the countries of the region because of the precarious situation they are in. The situation is a trade-off between economic development and sustainability. As developing an emerging economy, the primary goal of India is growth and prosperity of its citizens. But it stands at a point of time where climate change is affecting and it cannot afford to neglect it. It is a well researched fact that people from the developing and emerging nations are at higher risk of climate change for their lack of means to deal with it. The green technologies are costly at the moment. It is not possible for the countries to switch to electric vehicle or stop using coal power over night.

India is ambitious with its sustainable development goals and has recently initiated policies to encourage electric vehicles and has adopted small but impactful measures such as paperless offices and discontinuation of bottle waters. Ms Karambelkar shared that as a group, BIMSTEC can begin its cooperation in maritime space. A common standard for sustainable practices in all the activities done in water of the Bay of Bengal can be developed. The first measure can be to ensure sustainable fishing. Fishermen use deep sea trawlers which are extremely disruptive to marine ecosystem. It is important to find alternatives.

The second issue is regarding illegal fishing. Often fishermen enter into territorial water of another nation which needs to arrest and administer penalties. As the stock of fisheries is depleting, such trespassing may become more common or more illegal activities such as increase in crime at sea may occur. The enforcement agencies need to be prepared for such eventualities. Armed robbery at sea and piracy are prevalent security issues which at the moment may not be as intense as elsewhere in the world but this is something that the BIMSTEC countries cannot lose sight of.

Ms Karambelkar shared that natural gas has been discovered in the Bay of Bengal recently so in the future the region will witness higher vessel movement and laying of submarine pipelines which would require security. Marine collisions and spills need to be considered and rapid response should be developed. Keeping future need in mind, marine coast guards and authorities have to increase interaction. She explored the possibility of developing joint training programme, Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and if the countries can be more ambitious, then joint regional doctrine on these regional security concerns.

Another very important concern she addressed is the plastic pollution in ocean. She believed this is truly transnational in nature. Here a regional and national assessment in terms of the quantum of plastic waste generated, how much of it is recycled and recyclable and how much of it gets into ocean should be maintained. The littoral countries can enforce measures to ban single use plastic which may sound a small measure but the impact would be significant. At least it can be ensured that no plastic is reaching the ocean from the region which is home to 21 per cent of world population. Work needs to be done to make plastic recycle affordable. In respect of maritime capacity building, countries need to look at digital connectivity, people to people connectivity, and business to business connectivity. Furthermore, she also recommended following few essential measures that can be undertaken by the BIMSTEC countries:

- Establish BIMSTEC University to provide quality education to students of this region which would include a common programme on culture and heritage of the Bay of Bengal region.
- Maritime institutions, organizations of oceanography and marine research should establish working groups on issues faced by the region and come up with recommendations.
- Make this region as a hub of commercial ship building where BIMSTEC members can form a value chain.
- Development of a Bay of Bengal cruise to promote tourism.
- Formulation of common protocol and SOPs across BIMSTEC enforcement agencies. All the vessels and boats ought to be fitted with automated identification system. This needs to be made a regional norm.

Ms Karambelkar pointed out that regional security measures need to be taken by keeping instances such as the MH370 into mind. She concluded by saying that we are fortunate to be located around a maritime space and marine space by its inherent characteristic encourages connection over isolation.

# Presentation - V



**Professor Indrajit Rai**  
*Academic Expert, Nepal*

Professor Indrajit Rai, Academic Expert from Nepal said that being a naval officer, he understands the importance of sea. He highlighted the famous quotation of Admiral A T Mahan that, “He who rules the sea, will shortly rule land also”. A T Mahan’s version of the quotation depicts the importance of ocean. He opined that due to having command in the sea, Britain has ruled the world. Britain had command in the Indian Ocean, which is why it ruled its entire touching links- the heartland of Indian Ocean. During the partition of India and Pakistan, the latter chose the Karachi that was again divided into Chittagong port of Bangladesh, which was East Pakistan at that time. The harbour was given to Pakistan because it has significant importance. Having a harbour can flourish a country’s economic position. He again referred to the Admiral who said that economic prosperity will come through the sea transport. Sea transport is the cheapest transport, in comparison to others, that is air and land.

He mentioned that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) has given certain privileges and rights to landlocked countries. While talking about connectivity, Nepal is near to Bangladesh’s Chittagong port and it wants to use the Indian harbour, Visakhapatnam as well. So, Nepal wants access of these two harbours. He referred to one admiral of Chittagong port who told him that there was a delegation from Nepal who was demanding access from Kathmandu to Chittagong port. If Nepal can use the Chittagong port, it can enhance trade with China as well as India. Therefore, his humble request to the participants from those countries who have sea facility was that they must think of Nepal’s facility which they are deprived of. Nepal is trying to have some water transport like small ships in their big rivers and it has also established a department for that. Even then it has less facility as per as using the sea. In terms of connectivity, the Karachi was given to Pakistan because it connected Pakistan to China after the making of high altitude Gilgit road. China spent that money because all the ships of China had to go across the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean and they used oiling from China harbour. China’s ships did not get oil directly from Karachi port. According to him, this is the use of connectivity. His humble request to all was as the United Nations has given certain rights to land-locked countries, it is the duty of the neighbouring countries to give that facility to Nepal.



# Presentation - VI



**Mrs Sudharma Karunaratna**

*Assistant Secretary (Defence),  
Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka*

Mrs Sudharma Karunaratna, Assistant Secretary (Defence), Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka commenced her discussion by reflecting on the recent literature which identifies South Asia as the centre of the Asian century due to the rapid growth of maritime trade and shipping networks, emergence of regional powers and key incidents in the region. Therefore, she believed that it is important to ensure the safety and security of the maritime affairs of the region. But before looking at the strategic importance, trades and challenges of the Indian Ocean, she identified the importance of understanding the change in maritime nature around the oceans facing Sri Lanka. She stated that for obvious reason, 2009 is the bench mark for the country. Prior to 2009, Sri Lanka had a visible enemy but post 2009 it does not have any. In many forums, the maritime issues have been discussed but not having a visible enemy in the seas in no way mean that Sri Lanka is safe and secure. She opined that this stands true for any maritime nations. It is always easy for Sri Lankan Navy or any navy to fight an enemy that is visible. But when the situation demands to face an enemy that is not visible or identifiable and quite often disguised in the most innocent form, the challenge is mammoth. The present maritime context around Sri Lanka is very much similar to this situation.

Mrs Karunaratna stated that even though the country does not have visible enemy out at the sea to challenge the national security, it has quite a number of threats and challenges that needs to be paid attention to. These challenges are not new for Sri Lanka. Fisheries matters and pollution, search and rescue, responding to oil and chemical spills, poaching, illegal and unreported fishing, protection of maritime archaeological sites, protection of marine species are some of the examples.

Then she focused on the strategic importance of Indian Ocean region. She briefed that Indian Ocean covers 20 per cent of the earth and is the 3rd largest water coverage of the world. It comprises of 30 littoral states, 24 ocean territories and 17 land locked countries. The Arabian and Red Sea are two adjoining seas that are connected with the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean possesses with vast natural resources like minerals, fish, marine products, oil, gas and natural resources. It is also home to many choke points such as the Strait

of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Lombok and the Sunda Strait. The powerful phenomenon of globalization has highlighted the critical importance of the Indian Ocean sea lanes for trade and energy security.

Following the strategic importance, Mrs Karunarathna presented the economic importance of Indian Ocean. About 30 per cent of world's trade is handled in the ports of the Indian Ocean. Half of the world's container traffic passes through it. Continental shelves cover 4.2 per cent of its area and are reported to be very rich in minerals including tin, coal, uranium, etc. She stated that 40 out of 54 types of raw materials used by US industry are supplied by the Indian Ocean. Also, several container ports are located in the Indian Ocean. Indian Ocean possesses some of the world largest fishing grounds and 55 per cent of oil resource are present in Indian Ocean and 40 per cent of world's gas are in the Indian Ocean littoral states.

She also made connection between Sri Lanka's economy with the Indian Ocean. She stated that the Indian Ocean makes remarkable contribution to Sri Lanka's economy. The coastal belt consists of around 25 per cent of total land area, hosts around one third of the country's population, accommodates about two thirds of all industry facilities and over 80 per cent of tourism infrastructure. Marine fisheries of the Indian Ocean play a pivotal role in Sri Lanka's fish supply. Also Sri Lanka has been planning to discover oil resources in the Indian Ocean which could open a host of new economic opportunities in the near future.

Mrs Karunarathna opined that unlike the past, the present-day enemies are dynamic, irregular, networked and unorthodox. Security of this ocean can be threatened by means of terrorist attacks and transnational, criminal and piracy threats. She highlighted maritime terrorism, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, maritime piracy, illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing and human trafficking as the threats and challenges in Indian Ocean at present. Speaking of the role of Sri Lanka to overcome these challenges, she mentioned about the sharing of maritime experiences of Sri Lankan Navy. Even though the experiences have been discussed in various forums at various levels and also shared with friends in the regions, there are enormous amount of experience still to be shared with others in the region. She mentioned about Sri Lankan Navy's experiences in the maritime field, small boat operations, underwater and deep-sea operation, research and real time intelligence sharing.

She observed that even though there has been agreement to share intelligence and information on various subject matters, there has been an inherent reluctance to share valuable information and intel among the regional states whereas there exists advanced information sharing network among the pirates and terrorist networks. She mentioned that one important cornerstone in Sri Lanka's success against LTTE was the timely receipt of real time intelligence. So, when all countries are affected by maritime security challenges that concern the whole Indian Ocean region, the importance of sharing valid information remains crucial.

She stressed on the need for effective maritime governance in the region. Due to the vastness of the Indian Ocean region, there remains high possibility of vessels taking passage unnoticed or unmonitored. Even though there are advanced technologies that support detection of large vessels, many smaller vessels including fishing vessels largely remain anonymous. Limitation of visibility in the maritime domain creates a challenging situation. Strong regulation and effective monitoring is key aspect in this regard.

She also spoke of addressing piracy and maritime terrorism at the operational level. She believed this is another area where the regional countries need to cooperate. As the sea lanes of communication runs through this region, it is crucial for the whole world. Piracy and maritime terrorist can pose a grave threat to these sea lanes of communications. Identifying this, the Sri Lankan Navy, at the crucial stage of the conflict took a decision to counter the enemy in all fronts at the operational level. The aim should be to eradicate piracy from the region. Regional coordination and cooperation had led to the decrease in the number of

serious piracy incidents in South East Asia. Using this example, Sri Lanka geared to change its counter piracy operation from large fleet based to non-traditional approach which enabled the country to reach operation level of pirates and terrorism. This concept was proven to be highly effective against LTTE by introducing the rapid action boat squadron system which was a Sri Lankan concept.

At this part, Mrs Karunaratna made a reference to the concept of soft power by Joseph Nye which was gradually developed into a tool and used in many countries. She opined that this could also be used in the maritime security. She stated that the Sri Lankan Navy follows the policy of enemy of none and friends of all.

On the other hand, in terms of tools for addressing the challenges of the region, regional integration was identified as the most effective tool. She opined that one country can be more powerful in terms of military wealth and size, but unless the country has a strong link in the regional integration process, the mere survival of the country is questionable. As a region which is fast becoming the attention of the whole world by gradually taking the center stage of geopolitics, the regional security cooperation and coordination of regional institutes need to be ensured. The regional integration needs to focus on building up a cooperative security dialogue and effective apparatus. In developing such a mechanism, she proposed to consider the involvement of extra regional assistance as the aim should be to establish a global reach.

She concluded her presentation by stating that the maritime future of the Asian region is in hand of the nations, so how they cooperate with partners, especially intelligence sharing and understanding the magnitude of the threats to the region and thereby strengthening the common responses is integral. She observed that the success of such partnership will remain as the key in making not only the South Asian region but also the rest of the ocean safer and secured for the entire world. As part of this strategic ocean, Sri Lanka is eager to take part in any initiative that has a huge obligation regionally as well as internationally to fulfill.

# Presentation - VII



**Mrs Sumalee Sukdanont**

*Senior Researcher,  
Transportation Institute, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand*

Mrs Sumalee Sukdanont, Senior Researcher, Transportation Institute, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand focused her presentation on “BIMSTEC Maritime Connectivity and Potential Enhancement: Land Bridge Concept”. She said that the existing maritime transport routes in BIMSTEC comprises of short sea shipping among the countries in the Bay of Bengal and the shipping route via the strait of Malacca to Thailand. From Thailand, it can continue to China and the Far-East which are big consuming countries. The problem is, since the Strait of Malacca plays crucial role as the international crossroad of Europe and Asia as well as Australia, therefore, the traffic route would be crowded leading to spending more transit time and might caused traffic accidents. It might also lead to increasing risks of piracy and armed robbery.

She said that the number of vessels passing through the Strait of Malacca have been increasing steadily in both directions, the West to the East, and the East to the West. The incidents of piracy and arm robbery against ships between year 2000 and 2015 to the Malacca and Singapore state were very high. Although the situation has been improved, it may occur from time to time. The suggestion is the use of alternative route which is land bridge concept.

Mrs Sukdanont then focused on the concept of land bridge and how this can bring new opportunities for the BIMSTEC countries. She said that the land bridge concept is mostly defined as an intermodal connection between two oceans or coasts separated by a land mass. Land bridge approaches attempt to find out the efficient way to reduce the transit time by shortening the journey. This definitely requires a seamless connection for on time delivery for which proficient transition process is significant. In order to connect Thailand to the Bay of Bengal, the use of Ranong–Prachuab Kirikan Land Bridge which is located in the southern part of Thailand is crucial. This land bridge attempts to formulate the connection between the Gulf of Thailand's coast and the Andaman's coast by a land transport. There are existing maritime transport infrastructures in these two coasts; Ranong Port and Prachuab Port, and both designed to support large vessels. This means that the concept of land bridge can be put into practice without any investment of building a new port. Furthermore, there is existing land transport route: 230 km Highway Number 4. Therefore, after loading or discharging,



the cargo can be transported by truck in less than 3 hours to the other coast. This will help to save time and transportation cost. The suggestion of practical use of this land bridge concept for maritime connectivity is to upgrade the land transport route connecting the Ranong Port and Prachuab Port to 4 – lane highways.

Finally, she stated that in terms of transportation, only one major shipping route via the Strait of Malacca is not adequate and secure. Thus, what has been presented here by her is only one of the suggestions to finding alternative routes for securing the maritime connectivity and maritime trade route for BIMSTEC member states.

# Open Discussion



**Maj Gen Jiban Kanai Das (retd)** stated that security and development are intertwined. One cannot have security without development or have development without security. He shared his experience of visiting China in 1995 where he witnessed Chinese port constructions. He told that people in the past could not imagine the development unfolding in China at the time. But now he can relate to it.

He stated that for the BIMSTEC countries, there is no point of arguing why the organization did not expand to the north or west or east. Someday probably more countries will join. The present seven member countries do not have any land or maritime boundary dispute or island claims like in the South China Sea. He opined that the countries are in a congenial atmosphere in which they can pursue their development agenda. This forum gives that opportunity.

He expressed that development cannot be accomplished by one country only. If a country develops without its neighbours, the development will not be secure. There can be an inner competitive spirit but it is needed for the countries to develop together. The neighbours will be neighbours and they need to see each other developing.

He shared his disappointment at the lack of littoral connection and agreements on coastal shipping in the region. Due to that, all cargoes of Bangladesh need to go to Singapore and beyond. He referred to the honourable Finance Minister of Bangladesh according to whom the country will have a trillion dollar economy in ten years' time. But General Das pointed out the need for trading routes for such large economy. He opined that beside Bangladesh, Myanmar and India also require such routes. So, there is a huge potential for developing deep sea ports. He hoped that there will be days when internal traffic will also move from one part to another. He concluded by saying that the spirit is good and ideas are coming up, it is only required for the countries to mature themselves for dialogues and adopt a cooperative approach focused on the future in order to reach out from brown water to green water and eventually to blue water.

**Commodore Zamil**, Navy Headquarter, Bangladesh Navy agreed that there is a need for cooperation in the maritime sector. It is the most potential sector and all is hoping that in future most of the economic activities will be generated from this sector. Huge involvement is needed for capacity building of individual countries and how to make the cooperative mechanism work. He referred to the Chair of the session who told initially that the region needs to have cooperation not only with the agencies based on maritime sector, but also the land based security system in order to have a comprehensive approach to ensure maritime security in this zone. Therefore, there is a need for integration to devise a comprehensive approach of maritime security in the Bay of Bengal region.





Dr Mahfuz Kabir, Research Director, BISS, Bangladesh said that he agreed with Ms Moutusi Islam on the importance of marine resource accounting and that there is a need for more cooperation in this area. Marine resources accounting has to be integrated with national resources accounting. There is a system called environmental accounting system, and the national agencies such as Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics are coming together on the issue. However, there is also a big challenge facing the resources, not only are they threatened by climate change but also marine degradation and acidification. This, in the future will be a major problem and cooperation is needed in this area.

Mr Shahab Enam Khan, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh said that he has gone through several documents like Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy and BRI's new Maritime Silk Route plans. He informed that regarding the licences authorized by the International Seabed Authority (ISA), it is found that twenty-nine deep sea exploration licences has been granted to deep sea exploration for extraction of ocean resources which will be expanding between the South China Sea to all the way to Atlantic covering almost 1.3 millions square kilometers which is essentially raising eye-brows among the people who are working on environmental conservation. It also shows how the entire exploration crosses and the utility of blue water is changing. Moreover, by 2025 or 2028 the entire water from the Pacific to Atlantic will be plagued with two important innovations e.g., artificial intelligence driven technology and underwater drone system. It means that unmanned equipment and tools will be cruising under the water across the whole gamut of 1.3 million sq. Kms. In this respect, he asked whether preparations are taken to deal with it in terms of fisheries, protecting biodiversity and ocean health and ecosystems preservation. All these things bring all together in one platform. He also noted that the twenty-first century warfare will essentially be changed thus; the oceans and bays will always be at the forefront. Here, he gave the example of Yemen. It is believed that in Yemen civil strife has been based on civil aspiration. But the fact is that it is actually rooted in water. Because there was a lack of access to water henceforth, the world community started to tap on that. Hence, BIMSTEC has a reason to come together and start thinking about maritime security quite seriously



than ever. He informed that recently, Singapore has purchased a German submarine not only for defensive purposes but also for cooperative mechanism. Therefore, the defense also has to become much more cooperative rather than thinking it as an offensive tool.



Professor Syed Anwar Husain, Bangabandhu Chair Professor, Bangladesh University of Professionals, Bangladesh stated that the Indian Ocean is inhabited by as many as 48 littoral states. He shared that in 1993, he published a book titled 'Superpower and Security in the Indian Ocean: South Asian Perspective' where he suggested a paradigm on how to transform the Indian Ocean region into zone of peace. He still dreams that someday this region will be a zone of peace and cooperation. He said that he was really heartened and excited by listening to the discussions and seeing so many brains working hard to turn that

idea into reality.



**Amruta Karambelkar**, Research Assistant, Vivekanand International Foundation (VIF), India said that currently technology is expensive so we need to walk around ways to make it affordable. As per as India is concerned, it has just recently inaugurated the Imax centre in Gurgaon, where eventually it is hoping that members from the Indian ocean region will send their officers on deputation which is one way to look at enhancing Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). While talking about sustainable fisheries, she noted that there are lot of alternative experiments that are being been conducted i.e., people are looking for alternative sources of protein. In Germany, they are making bread out of insects and they are planting edible organisms under the sea. These are the ways science is developing where one can find alternatives.



# Remarks by the Chair



**Rear Admiral M Khaled Iqbal, BSP, ndc, psc**

*Vice Chancellor, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University (BSMRMU), Bangladesh*

At the outset, **Rear Admiral M Khaled Iqbal, BSP, ndc, psc**, Vice Chancellor, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University (BSMRMU), Bangladesh noted that all the previous maritime security dialogues by advisers of the seven respective countries have identified the Bay of Bengal as an individual security space itself. The idea of collaborative and cooperative measures for maritime security was identified in all three meetings. At the same time, in those meetings the importance of maritime security in the perspective of economic prosperity, human well being, poverty eradication all of which were covered in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been emphasized. Thus, maritime security should not be taken in an isolated manner; it should be part of overall security issues and challenges that are faced on land. There is a need to connect maritime security with the security situation on land. Then, it will be helpful to find out the challenges ahead and the type of cooperation that would be required to overcome the challenges.

He stated that for millennia the ocean and sea has been a source of economic well being for humans and a great source of food security. The sea lines of communication known as the international highway have access to the global economy all over the world. The world attention has been put on Indian Ocean because throughout history and for centuries starting from the colonial powers till now, it was at the center of attention because of the maritime trade and commerce, wealth and riches. The Bay of Bengal particularly has got an added significance because it is part of the overall geostrategic and geopolitical construct of the Indian ocean itself. Additionally, Bay of Bengal is placed in between Southeast Asia and South Asia. It is also caught in between golden crescent and the golden triangle and remains in the overall and greater Indo-pacific regional construct. Realizing the importance of the Bay of Bengal within the Indian Ocean construct, seven member states gathered in the second meeting of the Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum to discuss about these issues.

In this respect, he first drew attention to the fact that all the seven countries are developing in nature and they have embarked recently upon huge development agenda e.g., economic and socio-economic,



coastal development issues and deep sea ports. But security and development goes hand in hand. Thus, without maritime security it will be difficult to achieve the objective of the huge development agenda that lies ahead.

He added that maritime security issues e.g., Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUUF), drug trafficking, smuggling, terrorism, etc., are mostly transnational and transboundary in nature as they transcend maritime boundary. Thus, there is a need to have a cooperative and collaborative approach and common regional response mechanism.

He also talked about blue economy. Blue economy is a buzzword but it is something that lies ahead of all the developing countries and Small Island Developing States. Since the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, the blue economy issues have appeared in a bigger way for the developing countries, both the littoral developing countries and the land locked countries. He added that in any definition of blue economy, it mentions about sustainable economic development without the degradation of ocean health. There are more than twenty six elements which have been identified in the blue economy starting from ship building, shipping, ship recycling and maritime tourism on the one hand to naval architecture, offshore engineering, fishing, aquaculture, alternative renewable energy on the other hand. At the regional level, BIMSTEC countries need to find ways to safeguard 'blue economy' activities and resources. In this respect, he suggested that the discussion of the meeting should not restrict only to transboundary crimes but also should include maritime, blue economy issues and the way to safeguard these resources and activities. Because the ocean is universal and one country is related to another country with the sea. As the seas are interconnected therefore all other blue economy activities are interconnected.

He also discussed about ocean health. Because of the IUUF, there are huge overexploitations of fish. According to statistics, in the last thirty years overexploitation of fish has gone up from 10 per cent to 28 per cent. The data inferred that there is a gradual depletion of fish stocks. Hence, there is a need to check this overexploitation of fish. He also mentioned about the plastic pollution, oil pollution, land-based pollution, shipping pollution along with climate change, gradual sea level rise etc., which are man made problems. Due to these problems, coastal population is under immense threat. Thus, there is a need to safeguard these too. In this respect, he suggested that all the countries need to come up with certain common ocean policy and strategy. These are also related with the maritime security. The main nontraditional threat ahead is the piracy. But in the true sense of piracy by the definition of United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS), this region does not have piracy problem like the Horn of Africa. But it has the problem of armed robbery, smuggling, drug trafficking, gun running, etc. He added that horn of African by various coalition measures and task forces curbed piracy and BIMSTEC countries can learn lessons from it.

He also talked about maritime terrorism. Here, he gave an example of an incident in the Strait of Hormuz which had taken place just a few weeks back. Thus, there is a need to have a discussion on it. Additionally, there needs to have a mechanism regionally to check it. It has to be linked up to the terrorism on land as the discussion over maritime cannot be taken place in an isolated manner. He suggested the speaker of the meeting to concentrate on the capacity building issue, how each country can cooperate with the other in capacity building to ensure maritime domain awareness (MDA) and sharing of information. These are critical issues and have been discussed in the previous meeting. Thus, there is a need to have a stock taking of coast guard to coast guard cooperation, navy to navy cooperation, and other intelligence agencies, and where BIMSTEC countries stand now and where they should go.

He also discussed about connectivity. Connectivity issues in the region of the Bay of Bengal have to consider in terms of transshipment and port and shipping. He informed that few of the BIMSTEC countries already have coastal shipping agreement in place. Moreover, connectivity has to be considered in the overall construct of the regional connectivity on land. Bangladesh government always encourages the regional connectivity. For that reason, Bangladesh has always been ready to provide and to explore ways to give support and facilities to the landlocked countries like Nepal and Bhutan in both the Chattagram and Mongla port.

He also talked about sea ports and their development. Within the South Asian countries, there is not a single port within the first twenty ports of the world. According to Lloyd's list of the 100 best ports, in the South Asia, best is the Colombo port ranked 24<sup>th</sup> position, Jawaharlal Nehru Port ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> position and Chittagong port ranked 69<sup>th</sup> position. Out of top ten ports, China has seven ports. Thus, he recommended that for the development of maritime security port development is important.

He also discussed about direct shipping. Coastal shipping agreements are now on the table and already India and Bangladesh have signed. He noted that there is also a scope of direct shipping. For this, there is a need to have a coastal shipping agreement. Moreover, the SOP is already on the table and he is hopeful that after it got signed it will really take off.

On maritime security, he stated that Bangladesh and Indian Navy have conducted coordinated patrol once a year. He recommended to continue this at a more regular interval because there is a need to have intelligence sharing and information sharing on real time basis. If there are more coordinated patrols in the sea between coast guard to coast guard, navy to navy and agencies then it will have better benefits and action can be taken on the spot. He noted that for the economic development of all the BIMSTEC countries globally, there is a need to have more and more ocean-based activities without the degradation of ocean health. Thus, there is also a need to have a BIMSTEC blue economy cell or research center as soon as possible.

Though there are three maritime universities in BIMSTEC countries, he suggested having a BIMSTEC Blue Economy University. Having such kind of maritime university in Bangladesh is a wonderful decision of the government because they want to have their own homegrown maritime experts and do not want to depend on the foreign experts. They want that when they will go for feasibility study, consultancy, coastal economic zone, deep sea port these graduates from this university after completing their Masters, PhD within eight to ten years can become the maritime expert.

He also discussed about the common fisheries conservation policy. In this respect, he gave an example of Hilsha fishing. Hilsha fish is a transboundary fish stock. It overlaps in the water of India and Bangladesh. Bangladesh has its own fisheries regulation and conservation like 65 days ban. India also has similar types of regulation and conservation. These types of conservation policies are overlapped because this is migratory fish.



He also mentioned about the cross-boundary crimes. In this respect, he recommended to have the operation centers. There have been some real time information gathering and intelligence gathering. He stated that in Singapore there is a maritime fusion center. Thus, BIMSTEC member countries can think of such kind of maritime fusion center and can try to have more real time information. As all the countries have sensitivities therefore, every country needs to enforce law regarding real time information at their own. There is a need to come out from these sensitivities in a pragmatic way for better enforcement of laws in future.

He added that UNCLOS III gives some rights and privileges to the landlocked countries. However, with regard to Nepal and Bhutan, the use of ports for their economic activities for export and import is important. Hence, it is important to diversify the use of ports not depending on merely on one port but more than one port. He hoped that all the countries involved in the BIMSTEC meeting will be sympathetic to their cause and there will be some solution in the future. For maritime security, he also discussed joint training programmes not only among coast guards and navies but also among agencies. With respect to land bridge concept, he stated that it will be a very good proposition for countries like India and all the other countries of the BIMSTEC are likely to get benefit out of it.

In conclusion, he said that now a days maritime means universal. The seas and oceans are all interconnected and the UNCLOS III gives rights and jurisdiction to go up to 12 nautical miles by any country even inside the territorial water for an innocence passage. In addition, all the maritime crimes do not recognize the sea boundary. Thus, there is a need to have cooperation and collaboration and have a joint maritime response to address the challenges.





# Working Session – III

## Non-Traditional Security Threats with Emphasis on Cyber Security and Transnational Crimes (Illicit Trade and Trafficking in Arms, Narcotics Drugs Smuggling, Human Trafficking, etc.)

The third Working Session was entitled “Non-Traditional Security Threats with Emphasis on Cyber Security and Transnational Crimes (Illicit Trade and Trafficking in Arms, Narcotics Drugs Smuggling, Human Trafficking, etc.)”. In this session, presentations were made by **Abu Salah Md Yousuf**, Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Bangladesh; **Colonel Tshewang Rinzin**, Officiating Deputy Chief of Police, Crime and Operation Branch, Royal Bhutan Police HQs, Bhutan; **Dr Cheriyan Samuel**, Research Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (IDSA), **Ms May Thet Htun**, Deputy Director, Sub-regional Cooperation Division, International Organizations and Economic Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Myanmar; **Ramkrishna Subedi**, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal; **Mrs I T Weerasinghe**, Additional Secretary, State Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka and **Mrs Siriwan Sukorndhaman**, Security Coordinator Adviser, The Office of the National Security Council of Thailand. The Session was chaired by **Professor Dr Syed Anwar Husain**, Supernumerary Professor, Department of History, University of Dhaka and Bangabandhu Chair Professor, Bangladesh University of Professionals.

# Presentation – I



**Abu Salah Md Yousuf**

*Senior Research Fellow,*

*Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Bangladesh*

Mr Abu Salah Md. Yousuf, Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Bangladesh said that cyber security is different from other security issues because it does not maintain the border of sovereign countries. His presentation focused on the analysis of some of the emerging threats to cyber security and focused on securitization measures, particularly for BIMSTEC countries.

Mr Yousuf stated that there is a strong penetration of cyber technology all over the world. BIMSTEC is not out of it. The United Nations Group of Governmental Experts (UN GGE) and Budapest Convention 2001 emphasized the need for regional cooperation on cyber security. The 2017 BIMSTEC Security Advisors Meeting also emphasized that BIMSTEC needs to focus on cyber cooperation considering that development activities will be hampered if the countries cannot cooperate on the area. He referred that cyberspace is the 5<sup>th</sup> domain of security after land, sea, air and space. All countries need to cooperate in this newly emerging area.

Next, he illustrated how cyberspace is enlarging in BIMSTEC countries. He compared the number of mobile subscription versus the population in different countries. In Bangladesh, the number is 94 per cent, in Bhutan 107 per cent, in India 87 per cent, in Myanmar 105 per cent, in Nepal 134 per cent, in Sri Lanka 137 per cent and 133 per cent in Thailand. He also showed how this trend has increased over the years by comparing data of the year 2017 and 2019. In comparison to the percentage of total population, in Bangladesh it was 39 per cent in 2017 and in January 2019 it rose to 55 per cent. In two years, the rate of increase in Bangladesh is 16 per cent, in Bhutan it is 11 per cent, India 6 per cent, Myanmar 13 per cent, Nepal 5 per cent, Sri Lanka 4 per cent and Thailand 15 per cent. This shows there has been a huge expansion of cyberspace in the BIMSTEC countries.

Mr Yousuf shared that this expansion of cyberspace has been creating opportunities for all the countries, particularly in developing the data-driven economy. He referred that the data will be the key in this century. It is estimated that by 2023, cyber security industry will be worth of US\$ 639 billion. This would create a huge job opportunity in the technology world. Millions of jobs will be created for people in South Asia as well as in BIMSTEC countries. The government and industries are investing money to get talents in this sector. He was positive that this would create huge opportunity for the next generation.

However, Mr Yousuf highlighted the threats pertaining to cyber security in different categories. He explained that cybercriminals make profits, hacktivists are ideologically motivated to create problems for others, terrorist groups create ideological violence, thrill-seekers do it for satisfaction and insider threats make content on the web which creates problems for other people. These are also a threat for nation states considering the geopolitics.

Next, he discussed cybercrime and connected it to transnational crimes. He elaborated that traditional border crimes are also coming in the cyberspace. He mentioned that the cryptocurrency and crypto market is used in drug trafficking and human trafficking for hiding identity. He mentioned about the use of dark web by radical and terrorist groups for communication and shared some examples in the context of BIMSTEC countries. He stated that radical groups have been using dark webs to communicate and spread their radical and extremist ideas in Bangladesh. In Myanmar, it is seen that the newly emerged Northern Arakan army is also developing videos and spreading it on YouTube and other channels. He stated that the activeness of the insurgent groups in cyberspace is a threat for nation states. He also discussed how the autonomous systems like ATM booths are in trouble in Bangladesh and in many other countries. He mentioned that although Denial of Service (DoS) and Internet of Things (IoT) is emerging as a rich area of communication, it is also manipulated by cybercriminals from time to time. He used the example of the Bangladesh bank heist and the 2017 cyber-attack which spread to 130,000 systems in more than 100 countries of the world. It created a lot of problem for countries like Russia, China, UK, and Spain, simultaneously.

In this backdrop, Mr Yousuf noted that in the first national security chiefs meeting of BIMSTEC (2017), the emerging threats in cyberspace was highlighted. A three-day workshop on cyber security for BIMSTEC countries was held in New Delhi in 2018. The workshop highlighted the necessity for developing an effective cyber security mechanism in BIMSTEC. However, it was not mentioned how this process will move ahead and what are the modalities to be followed when BIMSTEC countries want to cooperate. Referring to the study of International Telecommunication Union (ITU) regarding the level of cybersecurity in BIMSTEC, he showed that the cyber security system is not good enough in all countries. In the global ranking, Bangladesh is positioned 78, Bhutan 125, India 47, Myanmar 128, Nepal 109, Sri Lanka 84 and Thailand 35. Thailand's position is comparatively better and the number of internet users is also the highest among the countries.

The cooperation mechanism developed by some of the regional organizations was mentioned by Mr Yousuf. European Union developed EU Cybersecurity Act 2019 and the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity worked on how to maintain cyber security issues in the European framework. Reference was also made of the Budapest convention which has been trying to set norms to ensure cyber security since 2001. For the ASEAN region, the ASEAN Cyber Capacity Program (ACCP) 2016 and ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy 2017 was developed. The African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection was also mentioned as the regional cooperation mechanism for cyber security in Africa.

Towards the end, Mr Yousuf focused on the types of cooperation BIMSTEC countries need to develop. He proposed a regulation mechanism which would include norms setting, harmonization of legal frameworks, institutional mechanism, standard implementation framework and confidence building measures among the countries. Speaking of norm-setting, he recognized and referred to UN which observed that there is a difference in norms among the countries as well as among the regions. Next he emphasized on capacity building. He stressed on technological know-how, awareness building, financial investment, intelligence capacity, professional training courses in cyber security and the development of academic curricular in cybersecurity. He concluded by highlighting that the expansion of cyberspace is not only a non-traditional security concern; rather it is going to be a traditional issue for many countries and regions. Cybercrime can be transformed into cyberwar. It is a global problem, but it requires local response, therefore, an effective regional cooperation system is required.

# Presentation - II



## **Colonel Tshewang Rinzin**

*Officiating Deputy Chief of Police,  
Crime and Operation Branch, Royal Bhutan Police, HQs, Bhutan*

Colonel Tshewang Rinzin, Officiating Deputy Chief of Police, Crime and Operation Branch, Royal Bhutan Police, HQs, Bhutan said that the Royal Government of Bhutan has, in particular, stressed on the need to be prepared for and take preventive action against the emerging threat of cyber-crime and transnational crime. While the internet has emerged as one of the most valuable means of communication, it is also being exploited for the purposes of terrorism and other criminal activities. The latest statistics show that the total number of internet subscribers in Bhutan has reached more than 8 Lakhs in 2019 which is a success story in terms of telecommunication but of serious concern in terms of cyber security especially, when people are not so social media literate.

On the transnational crime, Colonel Rinzin mentioned that Bhutan has had more than two thousand cases of drug-related cases reported between 2014 to 2019 which is huge in proportion to the total population. No cases have been reported on money laundering for financing of terrorism and illicit trafficking of arms as for now. However, the Royal Government of Bhutan has been proactive in putting pre-emptive measures such as establishment of Anti-money Laundering and Terrorism Financing Division within the Royal Bhutan Police, ban on import of private firearms, strictly regulating licensing of the existing private firearms and finalizing the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on TIP.

Then he focused on the issues related to cyber security. He said that the Bhutan Infocomm and Media Authority (BICMA) Act, 2006 has undergone an amendment to include provisions pertaining to cyber-terrorism and other cyber-offences. Bhutan now has BICMA Act 2018 which will help enhancing professionalism in the media, ICT sector, promote cyber-security and streamline other related policies.

Recognizing the importance of cyber-security, the Ministry of Information and Communications of Bhutan has also initiated a project to establish the Bhutan Computer Incidence Response Team (BCIRT). This team will serve as the national agency to collect, analyze and disseminate information on cyber incidents,

establish emergency measures for handling cybersecurity incidents and prepare disaster management, contingency plans and business continuity plans for critical information infrastructure. Finally, Colonel Rinzin provided several recommendations to the issues pertaining to cyber security and transnational crime. They include:

- Building the capacities of law enforcement officials in order to facilitate them in carrying out prevention, identification and investigation of TIP cases;
- Encouraging regular training for prosecutors and judges on TIP so that they will be aware of the current features of modern-day problems; the circumstances and control methods of traffickers under which victims may commit offences;
- Creating strong networking amongst BIMSTEC countries as the neighbouring countries would play either as destination or transit points;
- Disrupting illegal networks that are disseminating drugs and other illicit products across state borders through intelligence-led cross border collaboration and joint counter drugs activities;
- Need for stringent regulation and enforcement by neighbouring state Police since the number of pharmaceutical industries in the region is rapidly growing. Therefore, the threat to youth due to ease of access to cheap pharma-drugs is clear and easily available; and
- Strengthening information collection capacity, cross border cooperation in drugs investigation, capacity building and exploitation of international legal instruments to check transnational drugs and crimes.



# Presentation - III



**Dr Cheriyan Samuel**

*Research Fellow*

*Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (IDSA), India*

Dr Cheriyan Samuel, Research Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (IDSA), India started his presentation on “Cyber Security- Agenda for BIMSTEC” with a brief description of the “IDSA-BIMSTEC workshop on Cyber Security Cooperation”. He informed the audience that IDSA and the National Security Council Secretariat held a three-day workshop on cyber security from 05-07 December 2018 at New Delhi. The first two days of the workshop involved presentations, deliberations and discussions on national perspectives, followed by an interactive visit on the third day to India’s nodal agencies dealing with cyber security: the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team and the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre. The participants at the workshop deliberated on various issues of importance concerning cyber security in the BIMSTEC context. They adopted a “Roadmap for BIMSTEC Cyber Security Cooperation”. While talking about the background of the workshop, he noted that the first meeting of BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs held in New Delhi decided to establish a Joint Forum on cyber security in March 2017. At the Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs, held in August 2018, India proposed a three day workshop on cyber security for the BIMSTEC member states.

He articulated the various efforts being undertaken at the global stage to develop norms of responsible state behaviour in the realm of cyberspace. He noted the efforts made under the “United Nations Group of Governmental Experts (UNGGE) on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security” which is an UN-mandated working group in the field of information security. The UNGGE can be credited with two major achievements outlining the global agenda and introducing the principle that international law applies to the digital space. The UNGGE had six consultations with six regional organizations i.e., African Union (AU), European Union (EU), Organization of American States (OAS), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). However, he pointed out the absence of a regional organization from this region. He opined that BIMSTEC is ideally placed to fill that gap.

Referring to McAfee and Kaspersky, he said that Bangladesh and India witness the highest number of mobile malware attacks among the BIMSTEC member states and they are also amongst the five most attacked countries in the world. Besides, ransomware attacks and malware download rates are very high in BIMSTEC member states.

He then highlighted some of the initiatives taken by the member countries. Keeping in mind the aspirations of the country and the challenges to its digital economy, Bangladesh has already established a Cyber Emergency Response Team (CERT) and a cyber-tribunal and cyber appellate tribunal under its National Cyber Policy of 2006. On the legal front, Bangladesh has enacted four legislations: Pornographic Control Act, Information and Technology Act, ICT Act, and Digital Security Act. In 2011, the Myanmar government had established a cyber Security Steering Committee and it has also undertaken an initiative to set up a National Cyber Security Center. Bhutan has various policies in place to deal with cyber security activities, with the Bhutan Information and Communications and Media Act (BICM Act) being enacted in 2018. In 2009, Bhutan had come out with an Information Management and Security Policy. In 2015, a cyber security awareness assessment by the National Telecommunications Authority led to the creation of National Cyber Security Awareness Program in Nepal. Major cybercrime initiatives, including setting up a Digital Forensics Lab in May 2016, were part of the outcome of the assessment. Additionally, specialized investigative units were also set up to deal with cybercrime. Major cyber security initiatives of India include the 2013 National Cyber Security Policy, Information Technology Act 2000, setting up of CERT-In and NCIIPC as nodal cyber agencies under IT Act, and the Draft Personal Data Protection Bill 2018. The evolution of cyber security in Sri Lanka began with the e-Sri Lanka initiative by the Information and Communication Technology Agency in 2005, leading to various online initiatives.

He listed certain recommendations on combating cybercrime: First, immediate need for new means and mechanisms for capacity building and law enforcement, to tackle the new-age issues like information-enabled terrorism and the use of dark web and cryptocurrencies for illegal activities such as drug trafficking, arms trafficking, etc. Second, it is important to set up cyber forensic training programs and cybercrime analysis laboratories for better understanding of emerging technologies. Third, there is a need to develop a mechanism to provide information at the earliest to assist each other in investigations and law enforcement. Fourth, there is a need for cooperation to build institutions and infrastructures and sharing of information to address the issues of cyber terrorism and cybercrime. Fifth, a database of perpetrators of cybercrimes could be managed and blockchain technology could be used for geo-tagging of malicious actors.

He then provided a roadmap for cyber security co-operation among BIMSTEC member countries. First, there is a need to develop mechanisms for sharing of information on cyber threats, malware and cyber incidents. Second, identifying areas of cooperation in various aspects of cyber security, including capacity building should be emphasized. Third, there is a need to establish a BIMSTEC CERT-to-CERT cooperation mechanism. Fourth, sharing experiences and best practices for the protection of critical information infrastructure should be given priority. Fifth, law enforcement cooperation should be strengthened to address cyber crime, cyber terrorism and cyber security. Sixth, it is necessary to develop a BIMSTEC perspective on international cyber issues such as Internet Governance, Cyber Norms, data sovereignty, data protection, privacy etc. Seventh, there is a need to work together on developing voluntary norms of responsible state behavior in cyberspace, to ensure an open, accessible, secure, stable, peaceful and equitable ICT environment. Eighth, cooperation among stakeholders including government, private sector, civil society and academia for exchange of expertise, joint research, workshops and seminars should be encouraged. Finally, “BIMSTEC Cyber Security Workshop” needs to be held annually on voluntary and rotational basis, as a regional forum to discuss various aspects of cyber security cooperation.

# Presentation - IV



## **Ms May Thet Htun**

*Deputy Director, Sub-regional Cooperation Division, International Organizations and Economic Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Myanmar*

Ms May Thet Htun, Deputy Director, Sub-regional Cooperation Division, International Organizations and Economic Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Myanmar at the outset thanked the Government of Bangladesh, BISS and the BIMSTEC secretariat for organizing this important meeting and extending the warm hospitality towards the guests. She said that over the years the countries of the region have seen many traditional and non-traditional security challenges including the impact of climate change, natural disaster, maritime security, drug trafficking and human trafficking. To cope with these challenges, the Myanmar government has taken many steps including establishing border liaison office, narcotic drug control and anti-trafficking activities.

Ms Htun said that the Myanmar government has invested a substantial amount of resources in combating drug trafficking. According to the latest data by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, the poppy cultivation in Myanmar has dropped by 33 per cent to 55 thousand hectares in 2015 to 37 thousand hectares in 2018. In Myanmar, the police office and the customs authority have the core responsibility for drug control. They are coping with the problem of drugs in the hard pools and border areas, targeting at drug manufacturing, trafficking and drug abuse. Normally, the drug trafficking activities take place in the remote areas and thus the government is working closely with the various groups to control the drug trafficking. There is also capacity building programmes for training on drug control and re-habilitation programme for the drug abusers that are dealt with by the Ministry of Health and Sports. Besides, there has been a number of medical centres that have been opened for medical and drug abuse support treatment. Though the government has taken many initiatives, the number of rehabilitation centres is quite small compared to the population and cannot cater to the need of the whole country. And in this regard, Myanmar needs the help of international friends and donor countries. The drug problem is increasing and becoming prominent all over the world. But Myanmar is committed to combating it. In February 2019, Myanmar has introduced a new drug policy and seeks to promote better international and regional cooperation. In order to detect drugs, trafficking and other illicit activity, Myanmar has established 14 border liaison office along the border with Bangladesh, India,

Myanmar and Thailand.

She said that cyber security is also another threat to Myanmar. On 2010, the internet penetration in Myanmar was less than 0.3 per cent with only 130 thousand users. Last year in 2018 this figure has reached 34 per cent of the population. The main type of cybercrime reported in Myanmar is disinformation threats. But they have also seen the traditional types of cyber-crimes. In 2011, the national committee on cybercrime was formed under the ministry of telecommunication. And there is also a national cyber security centre. Myanmar is taking initiative against the drug and cybercrimes.

In the area of human trafficking, Ms Htun said that the Myanmar government has signed agreements with the neighbouring countries such as Thailand and China. Under those MoUs, they have identified cases and investigated that have taken place in the two countries. Furthermore, they are also taking part in combating trafficking in the region. They have mechanisms for stopping trafficking and investigations in an effective way. They are also reviewing to amend the laws on anti-trafficking. By 2017, they have identified 244 cases on trafficking and prosecuted over 600 offenders and 345 victims. The common type of trafficking cases are found in forced marriage, persecution, forced labour and surrogate mother. Up to August 2018, 145 cases in total, with over 200 victims were successfully identified and actions were taken.

In conclusion, she said that she truly believed that this meeting will help to build cooperation between the countries of the BIMSTEC region, a cooperation that will help to build a better future for the BIMSTEC region.

# Presentation - V



**Ramkrishna Subedi**

*Joint Secretary*

*Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal*

At the outset, **Ramkrishna Subedi**, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal, stated that Nepal is facing and suffering from both traditional and non-traditional security threats. An open border is Nepal's strength as well as one of its big challenges. The non-traditional security threat of Nepal includes: environmental challenges-climate change; environmental degradation- melting of Himalayas; natural disasters-earthquake and monsoon; outbreaks of infectious diseases-communicable and noncommunicable; slow pace of development; food shortages; illegal immigration and migration; human trafficking in the name of foreign employment /trafficking in women and children for prostitution and slavery; demographic changes; terrorism and insurgency; explosives and illegal materials/substances/hoax; small arms and light weapons and drug smuggling/users.

He stated that the causes of human trafficking in Nepal are: open border between Nepal and India; internal migration; family breakdown; lack of education, skills and sustainable employment opportunities; interlinkage and lack of conceptual clarity on trafficking; and foreign employment and labour exploitation. The strategy of Nepal to tackle human trafficking focuses on Rescue, Rehabilitation & Reintegration in the Society.

With respect to narcotics drugs, Nepal has ratified UN and SAARC conventions and they have full legal tools like narcotic drug control act, drug control policy and national drug control strategy that focuses on supply reduction and demand reduction. Moreover, social, economic and cultural aspects, lack of education and awareness, unemployment, poverty and minimal alternatives for livelihood are the prominent challenges to control illicit production of narcotic drugs in this region.

He also pointed out the trends of firearms and explosives e.g., use of small arms in murder, extortion and abduction, increasing seizure of firearms especially the small arms, sporadic incidences of explosion and explosion under the political mask. To overcome these trends, Nepal has legal provision e.g., Criminal Code Act, 2017 and Organized Crime (Prevention) Act 2013 as well as agencies e.g., Central Investigation Bureau, Nepal and Metropolitan Police Crime Division and Operational Police Units.



With regards to money laundering and financing of terrorism, he added that criminals exploit the technical deficiencies and legal loopholes of the member states, which makes combating them a seriously challenging task. He added that combating them requires continuous and collective actions, including, among others, sharing of best practices and information. The trends of money laundering and financing of terrorism includes: cash/value transfer through open border; informal financial channels (HAWALA, HUNDI); forged identity/documents /piracy, charity funding; businessmen and gangsters are involved, laundered abroad (Tax haven/ Offshore companies and Virtual Crypto-currency namely BitCoins) and communication through Internet and social media (Viber, WhatsApp, Facebook, Email etc.).

With regards to cybercrimes, he informed that technological advancement/use of information technology by terrorist organizations and transnational/organized criminal groups are a serious matter. Moreover, the internet is a key source of information, communication and propaganda for the extremist beliefs. The crimes include social media related cybercrime, piracy-related crime, fake profile marketing, threatening using email and social media/ blackmailing, defamation (Insult), unauthorized access/hacking; online business of restricted materials and cyber-conflict.

He also provided some possible recommendations to overcome these threats e.g., develop early warning systems in border, surveillance, intelligence sharing (establishment of the real-time information exchange and intelligence sharing mechanism); awareness through media and amplify credible voices; law enforcement and strengthening national legislation related to countering terrorism; develop an integrated, evidence-based approach to addressing the threats which focuses on promoting dialogue and conflict prevention; strengthening good governance and human rights; empowering women and promoting gender equality; promote peace education and civil society empowerment; pursue greater collaboration with BIMSTEC member states dialogue partners; establish a coordinating mechanism amongst BIMSTEC members states for partnership and regional cooperation; continue information sharing, exchanges on best practices among BIMSTEC member states; strengthen engagement and partnership and regional cooperation with BIMSTEC/ SAARC sectoral bodies; proper regulation of social media and the internet; promote BIMSTEC internet forum and security network; and promote trust and confidence with BIMSTEC members to deal with an uncertain future.

# Presentation - VI



**Mrs I T Weerasinghe**

*Additional Secretary, State Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka*

At the outset, **Mrs I T Weerasinghe**, Additional Secretary, State Ministry of Defence, stated that all over the world, the countries face tremendous security challenges. The region also suffers from serious security concerns of various transnational organized crimes such as illicit trade and trafficking in arms, human trafficking, cyber security, narcotic drugs smuggling, money laundering and terrorism, etc. Sri Lanka also faces these security threats severely. In 1948, Sri Lanka became an independent country with an aim to become a peaceful nation. Unfortunately, in 1980, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) started terrorism when for nearly thirty years totally damaged the country. The country got peace in 2009. Today, Sri Lanka has emerged as a nation where all communities can live together, enjoying their rights equally which is the sole objective of “one country, one nation and one law”. Through proper defence policies along with proper management systems within short period of time the country achieved peace and harmony. However, in April 2019, three churches in Sri Lanka and three luxury hotels in the commercial capital of Colombo were targeted in a series of coordinated terrorist suicide bombings. Due to globalization, Sri Lanka is also affected by drug trafficking, human smuggling, cyber security as well as transnational crimes.

On human smuggling in Sri Lanka, she said that since 2009 onwards people commenced migrating to Australia illegally through the sea routes. Majority of the illegal emigrants were Tamils who had seen the window of opportunity to seek asylum in Australia with the end of the war. This illegal activity is seen as a threat to security of Sri Lanka as well as Government of Australia. The Sri Lankan Navy was directed by the government to arrest these illegal activities taking place out at sea through the effective naval operations. She identified the reasons for illegal emigration, which are: financial prospects, poverty, smuggling blacklisted criminals/wanted terrorists, proper emigration being restricted by destined countries, maintaining international network of illegal activities such as human/weapon/drugs smuggling, black money/easy earning, joining the rest of the family, briefings from the personnel who are already settled down in interested countries, misinformation by interested parties for their advantage, and influence by Tamil Diaspora, etc. She informed the audience that only available navigational aid for them is ordinary Global Positioning System (GPS). However, some boats also had satellite

phones. The countermeasures for human smuggling include maritime and ground intelligence operations, technical operations, maritime surveillance, coastal surveillance, and air reconnaissance.

She then talked about the tactics of human smugglers. The human smugglers tend to change the point of assembly on land as well as the point of departure for the final destination. There is arrangement regarding process, logistics and financial transactions by agents. The travel is made via legal air to another country followed by illegal onwards travel (e.g. joining an illegal maritime venture). Besides, the smugglers are always disguised as fishermen.

She described the actions taken by the navy on arresting of the boats. The boat is taken to ashore by naval craft. Medical checkup of all the personnel is done by the naval doctors. The navy provides food/water and other necessities such as milk for children. Interviewing of personnel is done by the navy initially before handing them over to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Finally, the CID forwards the personnel to courts. The personnel are handed over to CID because it has a separate 'Maritime Unit' available to conduct inquiries on these activities which efficiently maintains a database of such activities. Besides, the 'Maritime Unit' has direct links with the Australian Federal Police. For penalty, the crew members (facilitators) will face jail term of one year or less. The passengers are subjected to fine of Rs. 5,000 to 10,000.

She then identified the reasons for the decreasing human smuggling activities in Sri Lanka. They are: efficient role played by Sri Lanka Navy at sea/land (intelligence, surveillance, patrolling), stringent measures imposed by destination countries, arresting of key human smugglers in Sri Lanka, excellent coordination support/assistance rendered by government of Australia, effective information sharing between Australian and Sri Lankan intelligence agencies, and effective awareness programs among the public. She said that capacity building and technical support from the government of Australia was crucial to achieving this. On strategic level, the government of Australia also assisted in economic development in Sri Lanka. The country helped them to monitor and take legal action against Tamil Diaspora organization and human traffickers along with strengthening of emigration laws. On operational/tactical level, the country helped them in gathering intelligence (fund, equipment etc), through supplying required technology such as transponder and deep-sea surveillance assistance.

Finally, she listed certain recommendations to counter human smuggling. First, maritime patrols covering most probable sea routes of human smuggling along with surveillance along coastline should be continued. Second, sharing of intelligence/information is necessary. Third, exchange of training programs is needed. Fourth, fishing community should be engaged for effective information gathering. Fifth, dedicated intelligence network is crucial. Sixth, awareness programs for civilians should be continued. Finally, necessary actions should be taken to minimize gaps in legal system.

# Presentation - VII



**Mrs Siriwan Sukorndhaman**

*Security Coordinator Adviser*

*The Office of the National Security Council of Thailand, Thailand*

Mrs Siriwan Sukorndhaman, Security Coordinator Adviser, The Office of the National Security Council of Thailand, Thailand noted that the Bay of Bengal region now has to face with complex linkages between transnational crimes, causing difficulties for government authorities to tackle with. Moreover, the advancement of information technology multiplied with the nexus of terrorism and transnational crimes has exacerbated far-reaching consequences to security, stability, and prosperity of our community. Major non-traditional security challenges in the BIMSTEC region are highlighted by cybercrime, drug trafficking, and human trafficking.

On the issue of cybercrime, she pointed out that more than half of the world population is currently online. For Thailand, until the present year, there are 49 million mobile social media users, or 71 per cent penetration of mobile users and 51 million active internet social media users, which is expected to increase twice with the development of hi-speed internet.

She stated these statistics to imply that how important are economic values in the digital platform, not only for ordinary people and business sector but also for criminal networks to commit online criminal activities. For Thailand, types of cybercrimes which had most negative effect on Thai users is online fraud. By hacking into victims' online accounts through phishing or e-mails scam sent to victims' e-mail contacts, perpetrators can gain all personal information of victims such as users' identities and passwords.

In order to address these challenges posed in the country, the Thai government has released Thailand's Cyber Security Strategy in 2017 followed with an implementation of Cyber Security Act which came into force in May 2019 together with the establishment of National Cyber Security Committee (NCSC) as a corrective mechanism to address cyber threats. She said that in a borderless realm of cyberspace where perpetrators of cybercrime and their victims can be located in different regions, its effect can ripple through societies around the world- which can cause serious harm and pose very real threats to victims worldwide. Hence, international cooperation on capacity building and skill development for operation officers, as well as early warning of

information related to crimes between member countries should be emphasized to help protect the use of cyberspace from attacks and misuse of cyber technology.

While focusing on drug trafficking, she said that it is undeniable that Thailand, as one of the major transportation hubs in Southeast Asia, has been used as a major transit point for illicit drugs bound for deliveries to third countries. The evidence showed that online platforms, especially Facebook, Line, Instagram and dark websites are used for communication between drug suppliers, couriers and customers. To tackle with drugs trafficking, Thailand has sought every possible way to cooperate at all levels and in all dimensions. For example, enforcement of National Drug Control Strategic Plan (2015-2019) focused on integration of relevant government agencies to thoroughly solve the domestic drug problems. At the regional level, Thailand participated in Safe Mekong Operation for minimization of drug production in the Golden Triangle Area, which is one of the major drug production and trafficking areas in the world, as well as the BIMSTEC Cooperation on Counter Drug Trafficking.

On the issue of human trafficking, Thailand has been affected by the process as the country of origin, transit and destination country. Nowadays, the exploitation of victims occurs not just through force or abduction, but through fraud or deception in the process of voluntary migration, which people undertake to search for a better life. She opined that to tackle these problems, cooperation beyond borders is crucial. Countries of origin, transit point and destination should work together to address the problem's root causes as well as contributing factors. Through collaboration in the region, the BIMSTEC subgroup on human trafficking can be a significant cornerstone for BIMSTEC member states to share and discuss ways in which member states can better cooperate to address this challenge.

She stated that combating transnational crimes requires a coordinated transnational response and cooperation. Such cooperation does not need to be focused on number of initiatives, but to enhance the existing platform for deepening collaboration. As noted in the Annual Meeting of BIMSTEC Security Chiefs, addressing security challenges requires an enhancement of cooperation and coordination among BIMSTEC member states. The first priority should be focused on information sharing by making a better use of existing information-sharing mechanism (which is The BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Intelligence Sharing), and to facilitate continuity of robust cooperation between BIMSTEC member states. She believed that with the common will and joint efforts, and with existing mechanism that is present in BIMSTEC, addressing transnational security challenges would not be too difficult.



# Open Discussion



Mr Shahab Enam Khan, Professor, Department of International Relations, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh stated that global trends are changing in terms of ageing population. The world's population is ageing, every country in the world is experiencing growth in the number and proportion of older persons in their population. It means that countries like Japan, China, India and Bangladesh will be embarking on a situation where more than half of the population's age will be on an average sixty five. Thus, population ageing is poised to become one of the most significant social transformations of the twenty-first century with implications for nearly all sectors of society.

The second trend is the innovation or application of cost-effective, cheaper education and literacy technology. Technologies are becoming intuitive and encryption has become easier than ever. He mentioned that 95 per cent of the global internet penetration is still in the deep and dark web which is barely possible to intersect and intervene. Therefore, cyber security is still in nascent state and by 2050 a completely different scenario will be seen for which there is no preparation. The hierarchical security structure in the Westphalia system and the post-Westphalia system has been significantly changed by technology. The people who are between the ages of eleven to thirty five cannot think of a life without a mobile phone. The whole idea of power which was concentrated in state has shifted towards the pockets of the population. Therefore, BIMSTEC has to pay attention to emerging nontraditional security threats. With the ageing population, there is a differentiation which will continue to rise in the racial and ethnic health profile. The ethnic disparities will continue to rise. There is a huge sense of disparity going on both in terms of colour as well as gender which is being debated in the UK Parliament as well.

He noted that the arms, drugs and narcotic smuggling are related to the internal economy. The informal economy rises when the formal economy fails. The economic disparity is also one of the major issues. In the last ten years, eleven jobs have become absolutely obsolete. By 2025, almost 35 per cent job will disappear as these jobs will become irrelevant. The necessity and the dimension of diplomacy have changed as well. Therefore, BIMSTEC should focus on building the capacity of all the diplomatic agencies as well as the specialized agencies to bring together to have dialogue regularly on thematic issues.

He mentioned that there are new dimensions in the market structure as well. For the member countries, the region has become an important market. He noted that America and Europe suffered from the economic shock of 2007-08. But interestingly, India and Bangladesh did not suffer due to the strongest manufacturing base. Therefore, these manufacturing bases have to be enhanced. BIMSTEC has a mandate of trade facilitation. Here, he opined that regional connectivity through BIMSTEC is much more efficient and plausible than any other existing mechanism.

While talking about the existing cooperative mechanisms, he cited the example of Border Liaison Office (BLO) between Bangladesh and Myanmar. He also highlighted the Deputy Commissioner and District

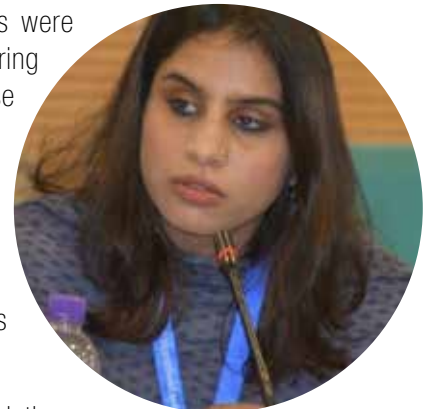
Magistrates sitting together in solving the border issues of Bangladesh and India. These real initiatives have to be replicated across the BIMSTEC region. BIMSTEC can play a major role in creating BLO sort of initiative across the region.

He commented that the Bay of Bengal can become the focal point of converging Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The landlocked countries need global connection. Unless they are globally connected, the global supply chain will remain constraint. He put emphasis on regional connectivity that complements both IPS and BRI. In this regard, he opined that BIMSTEC is in a position to bring these two strategies together.



**Ambassador Kazi Anwarul Masud**, Bangladesh focused on the downsides of technology and its impact on society. He opined that excessive involvement of young people on internet is making them socially isolated. A trend of societal degradation is visible in all countries. While organizations like BIMSTEC are focused on addressing the international aspects, the societal change in the respective countries need to be addressed and its effects should be carefully judged.

**Amruta Karambelkar**, Research Assistant, Indo-Pacific Vivekanand International Foundation, India said that she disagreed with the discussant on the point that the South Asian countries were not affected by global recession because of their manufacturing capacities. She said that the countries were not hit by the global recession because they were hardly integrated into the global value chain system. She also opined that it is not true that the South Asian countries had not been affected by the global recession. While the economies had not taken the hit, they were affected in terms of exports and the number of scholarships available to the South Asian students. She also agreed with Shahab Enam Khan regarding the point that the demographic dividend is becoming lower rapidly and in the next ten to fifteen years it is Africa where most of the population boom will happen.



**Mr Shahab Enam Khan**, Professor, Department of International Relations, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh made a point of clarification of what he had said previously about economic dividend and its linkages with the age structure, which was essentially what Ms Amruta had mentioned. Looking at the whole productivity factor of the youth, Bangladesh might have a younger population still giving dividend to the system until 2025, but the problem lies with several issues.

First one is the racial and ethnic disparities in health services which is a major problem. The economic disparity will continue to rise and the very simple reason behind it is the climate change as well as the strong phenomenon of enforced migration. Even looking into the Chittagong Hill Tracts, particularly Cox's Bazar people coming from Myanmar, and the cases of what is happening in India, Pakistan and the Middle East. Now the region is seeing the rise of ultra-nationalism and protectionism which is coming back to the system as well. It actually shows that the migration capability will be essentially an enforced phenomenon; if that is the case then again the states will not be able to withhold this entire synergy the youth population actually exposes.

He mentioned that there will be a cluster of changes. In one hand the service sector will continue to rise which means the cost of internet and the services provided by the internet agencies or the ISPs or the mobile operators will be much higher than the manufacturing sector. Looking at the growth pattern of

China and of India and Bangladesh, it is seen that the latter' hasn't really shifted their large portion to the service sector. Service has a major contribution to the economy. But if 2007-08 GDP growth is observed, it is observed that after the shock it did not relatively change much. He said that he would rather take it that the region survived the shock, but it is not yet globally integrated. He cited the example of Nepal and Bhutan- who does not have the integration with the global chain services and connectivity. But if manufacturing sector is ignored, probably a major mistake will be made, the reason is if one goes to Rajasthan, Kerala, Odisha, and Bihar- there is plethora of growth of small and medium industries. Even the startups- making achara, for example, are booming. The whole idea of China to grow and exercise its economic mastery was that they have the manufacturing sector intact. Coming down to Bangladesh, one of the major problems is its economic diversity, which is heavily dependent on remittance, export of readymade garments etc. Even the readymade garments is a manufacturing sector and about 75 per cent of earning coming from the readymade garments, it is essentially the manufacturing sector. Even taking Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Make in India" policy, it is all about made. That is the reason for his saying that the whole idea of making is to boost the manufacturing sector and this is where the region needs to be strong.

Myanmar has a very interesting model with China. In Rui Lee, he has seen that the Myanmar are coming all the way to Rui Lee, working and going back in the evening. They have the passes and the manufacturing sector is rising on both sides. The labours are being bartered, not in terms of the energy, but also in terms of money. All these models also depict that manufacturing has to be the ultimate objective if one wants to sustain and protect enforced migration that Bangladesh is suffering from a long time. Enforced migration is the plaguing factor for illicit trade, human trafficking, drugs smuggling and henceforth even radicalization. Perhaps the 1.1 million people that Bangladesh is having in Teknaf is another booming ground which will face lot of security questions incurring a lot of costs.



**Mr Md Shamsul Haque**, Director General, SAARC and BIMSTEC, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh wanted to know at the backdrop of the cyber security issue what recommendations Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum can put forward to policymakers especially the security policymakers of BIMSTEC countries. He added that user's interface of the digital world is becoming very friendly, easy and visible. At the same time the technological issues are going from deep to dark. It means that in the real world, one can go home and lock door as well as can build a wall consequently even an atom bomb cannot destroy it. However, in this world one can make firewalls. As a result, security can become very strong but the magic of technology is not visible. That means it operated, built and known by administrators who are beyond control. Even people do not know to whom they are meeting and negotiating with and from whom they are getting guidance, money and benefits. Thus, it is vulnerable and can be compromised. In this respect, he also wanted to know what kind of coalition and task force BIMSTEC member states can form to protect information, property, and prosperity.

# Remarks by the Chair



**Dr Syed Anwar Husain**

*Bangabandhu Chair and Professor,  
Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Bangladesh*

Dr Syed Anwar Husain, Bangabandhu Chair and Professor, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Bangladesh stated that the United Nations came up with the most comprehensive definition of security in 2005. The definition has three dimensions namely freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity. He mentioned that one common theme running through all the presentations is “fear psychosis”. In that sense, traditional or nontraditional security are almost two sides of the same coin. Although few points were made on human trafficking, narcotics and small arms, nevertheless the session mainly focused on cybercrime which is a man-made disaster. In fact, René Descartes and Mahatma Gandhi always supported very limited use of technology. Technology is invented to ease life and living. However, in the present time, the focus is on overcoming the complications induced by latest technology. About fifty years back, there was nothing called cybercrime. In thirty years back, there was no cell phone. That does not mean that the people were living incomplete lives. Technology is invented to better the life and living conditions which should be at our command. However, it seems that the people are at the command of technology resulting in problems. He quoted from Alexander Pope- “Hope springs eternal in the human breast”. Therefore, Professor Husain hoped to overcome this complications. However, he observed that the actual action on the ground is missing.

He noted that BIMSTEC is a little bit different from other regional and sub regional bodies. From the very beginning, it is a sector-driven body. Right now, as many as fourteen priority sectors of cooperation have been identified. Everyone wishes to see BIMSTEC becoming dynamic, progressing and delivering. However, in economics, there is a saying- “If wishes were horses, beggars would ride” which means that financial decisions about the future go wrong because the future cannot be predicted. If an in-depth analysis of the track record of BIMSTEC is made, there is both optimism and criticism. BIMSTEC is existing even after twenty two years. This is certainly a testimony to the resilience of this forum. However, BIMSTEC must have the political will of the seven member countries. He remarked that seven is a lucky number. So, why should not BIMSTEC be a successful and lucky regional body?

In conclusion, he hoped that BIMSTEC member countries would overcome their geopolitical, geoeconomic and parochial considerations and rise to the pinnacle of political will to reach across each other. He opined that member countries should act as close-knit neighbours to promote the common goals and foster cooperation. He informed the audience that in 1993 he published a book titled “Superpowers and Security in the Indian Ocean: A South Asian Perspective”. In that book, he suggested a paradigm to transform the Indian Ocean region into a region of peace and cooperation. He considers BIMSTEC as one of the building blocks in actualizing that dream.



# Working Session – IV

## Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR)

The fourth Working Session was entitled “Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR)”. In this session, presentations were made by Professor Dr A Q M Mahbub, Department of Geography and Environment, University of Dhaka; Nazmul Arifeen, Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Bangladesh; Mr Ugyen Penjor, Senior Program Officer, Department of Law and Order, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, Bhutan; Hemant Harishchandra Kotalwar, Joint Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), India; Lahpai Zau Goone, Member, Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS), Myanmar and Mr Sudarshan Prasad Dhakal, Expert from Civil Society, Nepal. The session was chaired by Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc, Director General, BISS, Bangladesh.



# Presentation - I



**Dr A Q M Mahbub**

*Professor, Department of Geology and Environment,  
University of Dhaka, Bangladesh*

At the outset, **Dr AQM Mahbub**, Professor, Department of Geology and Environment, University of Dhaka stated that a wide range of natural hazards along with recent threat coming from climate change can be included in the category of the threats or insecurity originated by nature. Climate change threats or risks are mostly linked with growing economic competitions among nations. These threats or insecurity coming from disaster and climate change impacts are severe because it has been threatening the food and health security along with the habitats of all species.

He mentioned that Bangladesh is one of the most experienced in having a wide range of hydrometeorological hazards. Efficient disaster management has made Bangladesh a global role model in managing natural disasters and reducing losses of human lives. The vision of the government of Bangladesh towards disaster management is to reduce the vulnerability of people, especially the poor, to the effects of natural, environmental & human-induced hazards to a manageable and acceptable humanitarian level. The mission is to bring a paradigm shift in disaster management from conventional response and relief to a more comprehensive risk reduction culture.

He then briefly mentioned about the evolution of disaster management in Bangladesh. In the 1970s, there was response-oriented disaster management. The Gorky Cyclone of 1970 killed 300,000 people which resulted in the establishment of cyclone preparedness program in 1972. After disastrous floods in 1987 and 1988, the international development partners supported a project titled Flood Action Plan (FAP) from 1990 to 1996 to formulate the strategy. In 2000, Comprehensive Disaster Management program was formulated and later launched in 2004. In 2005, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management was renamed with new disaster management vision in the latest development. The National Plan for Disaster Management (2016-2020) builds on the achievements and existing institutional framework in Bangladesh and aims to guide national efforts to achieve key disaster management priorities. During the last fifteen years, there has been a paradigm shift – from relief based approach to proactive approach.

Regarding climate change impact in Bangladesh, he noted that it is not a myth; rather it is a well-established fact. Bangladesh experienced temperature extremes in the recent past. Some research findings and observations in support to this statement are: erratic behaviour of rainfall, increased incidence or frequency of severe floods, increased frequency of cyclone, increased surface and groundwater salinity intrusion, increased vulnerability of people and places in the coastal zones, increased involuntary migration, etc.

He then talked about the impacts of climate change on water resource and hydrological cycle. The water resource is the most vital key to ensure sustainable development in many sectors in Bangladesh. Climate change impact is going to affect this vital resource very severely. Bangladesh has been blessed with enormous amount of freshwater but unfortunately over 90 per cent of it comes from five neighbouring countries. The availability of water has been declining very fast in recent decades and it will continue to reduce further. Given this situation, attention should be given to ensure the supply of this key resource.

Embankments are an essential part to control flood and saline water. It is important to construct sustainable embankment/polder and plan for multi-purpose embankment/polder. It will not only protect costly built settlements but also generate a wide range of livelihoods/employments along with some vital services to local communities.

Although Bangladesh has made substantial progress in adaption there are still some challenges: acquiring adequate and appropriate knowledge, poor economic background of the people, mainstreaming adaptation knowledge into the education and training, inadequate fund, changing mindset of the common people, lack of insurance, and inadequate marketing knowledge. He then identified the challenges for regional cooperation: mistrust among the countries (communal, political, economic), lack of pro-active policy, tunnel vision of the executives/politicians, pro-rich and anti-poor policy formulation, absence or weak participatory approach, short outlook of the executives/politicians, donor-driven policy bias, lack of access to data and information, lack of professional cooperation, absence or poor network among the institutes, partners and professionals and general negligence of the subject/issue.

Finally, he provided some recommendations. The success in disaster and climate change risks reduction requires the development of sustainable preparedness plan, especially at community level. To build a disaster-resilient nation, undertaking school-based Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) curricula are needed. Addressing social vulnerabilities (poverty, inequality, gender disparity, representation) and regional inequalities are essential for sustainable Disaster Management (DM) plan. DM is an effort where coordination among the stakeholders is essential. In DM planning, a harmony should be maintained among the key measures of DRR (e.g. prevention, mitigation, adaptation and migration). It is important to mobilize and train disaster volunteers for more effective preparedness and response against any disaster. He also emphasized consolidating knowledge networks. Besides, learning from best practices in disaster preparedness, mitigation and response are crucial. Visionary leadership along with good governance can ensure addressing the challenges of climate change and disaster risks effectively and devise sustainable development planning. He urged everyone to unite together under the BIMSTEC umbrella with a view to encounter natural hazards and climate change risks and ensure sustainable development goals (SDGs).

# Presentation - II



**Nazmul Arifeen**

*Research Fellow, BISS, Bangladesh*

Nazmul Arifeen, Research Fellow, BISS, Bangladesh focused his presentation on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR) from a security perspective. At the beginning of his presentation, he wanted the audience to refresh their ideas and memories on the discussion of disaster relief and humanitarian assistance in the security discourse, and how it has changed over time. In order to do that, he took a step back to look at the cold war era's bipolarity. During that era, security was mainly traditional and military in nature. But things changed when the former Soviet Union collapsed. After its collapse, people started to rethink about other problems because the country collapsed not because of external problems but for internal economic and social problems. At that time, a very remarkable UNDP document by Mahbub ul Haque titled "Human Development Report 1994" came out, which introduced the term 'human security'. The document opened people's eyes to look at various problems that the international community is facing. This included problems such as those created by natural disasters, and are not military in nature.

Mr Arifeen stated that, the major powers like the USA reoriented their military doctrine and started assisting other countries in need of help. For example, in 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh, they sent their military to support. After the 2004 tsunami they also sent military in search and rescue operation. Due to this type of reorientation within their military doctrine, USA's role was very much praised all over the world.

Theorists also try to understand the changing nature of military doctrine and engagement in different kinds of activities outside their traditional role. One such theorist has been Joseph Nye who said that the world has changed to a certain extent that a country cannot rely on hard power but has to focus on soft power. The power here is defined as a country's capacity to engage another country either with coercion or by incentive to do something that the second country would not do otherwise. From that point of view, there is a shift from hard power to soft power. Then again, Nye talked about smart power as both soft power and hard power is not enough singularly. Rather, a country's success lies in its ability to utilize the hard and soft power in combination and using them as smart power.

Using the security-centric idea of soft power, hard power and smart power, western countries intervened in regions. But the local population have not been very supportive of the intervention. For example, the intervention of the USA in several countries of the Middle East has not been well received by the international community. This led to the shift to the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P), under which many countries got assistance in various forms. Mr Arifeen then suggested that the discussion regarding humanitarian assistance and disaster relief should be revisited in the light of the concept of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR). Because the BIMSTEC region does not believe in intervention in another country by violating their sovereignty. Thus, he inferred that it is the BIMSTEC idea of HADR and it is different from the western conception of R2P. He added that HADR refers to engaging both traditional and civil forces in times of need.

He then identified two phases of HADR. First one is humanitarian assistance, which tends to be a planned and proactive activity. The second one is disaster relief which tends to be reactive. In time of crisis, it is very difficult to devise mechanisms if there are no established mechanisms in the place. For example, the armed forces of several countries rendered valuable support in the search of the missing plane of Malaysia MH370. In the beginning, Malaysia tried to find the plane alone at first, then all the littoral countries came together to help in this regard later. But if an established mechanism had been present at the time, the process could have been speedier and brought better results. In the incident of Rana Plaza in Bangladesh, the armed forces were called in because they have the capacity, reputation and equipment to do the acts of evacuation, search and rescue. For that reason, there is a need to look at the HADR both from traditional and non-traditional perspective.

Mr Arifeen noted that the problem of BIMSTEC is that it is one of the most densely populated regions of the world. The current population of BIMSTEC is 1.7 billion which is 22 per cent of the world's total. Due to overpopulation, in the event of any natural disaster, it becomes difficult for civilian forces who may not always have that required level of training and equipment to manage the situation alone. Hence, there is a need for coordination not only among civilian forces of the nations but the military forces who have been trained for this kind of activity. He also mentioned that Bangladesh is performing very well under the auspices of UN peacekeeping operations. He suggested that BIMSTEC countries should capitalize on that expertise gathered in peacekeeping in their natural disasters.

Finally, he made some recommendations. He said that in BIMSTEC for disaster management cooperation there is a need to focus on NGOs and local population along with traditional forces. This is because in the case of Bangladesh, along with government, local NGOs and population have a lot of expertise in doing DR. He also suggested that the cooperation of military forces disaster response should be done at the strategic, operational and tactical level. The political level should also be included so that there is harmonization of doctrinal orientation. Lastly, there should be Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) between cooperating forces for easier communication, as swift communication is key for an effective HADR.



# Presentation - III



**Mr Ugyen Penjor**  
*Senior Program Officer,  
Department of Law and Order,  
Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, Bhutan*

Mr Ugyen Penjor, Senior Program Officer, Department of Law and Order, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, Bhutan said that it is common knowledge that the earth's temperatures have reached unprecedented levels, and BIMSTEC region is particularly vulnerable to climate change threats. The main non-traditional security challenge faced by Bhutan on the ecological front has been the threat of Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF). As of today, Bhutan has some 2,647 glacial lakes in the north. The increased risk posed by GLOF due to melting glaciers and global warming presents a danger to socio-economic infrastructure, human settlements and livelihood.

Moreover, Bhutan sits on one of the most active seismic zones in the world, which is increasing its vulnerability to major earthquakes. He informed that damage of US\$ 52 million was felt by Bhutan on structures during the 2009 earthquake. Also, other ecological vulnerabilities such as landslides, extreme monsoon flooding, torrential rain and extreme drought not only pose a threat to food security but also put to test the long-term sustainability of the hydropower sector and the agriculture-based economy.

In the face of such ecological vulnerabilities, Bhutan has always been at the forefront in championing climate change and environment. A case in point has been Bhutan's ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2016, which strives to keep the average global temperature below 2 degree Celsius. Moreover, against the overarching constitutional mandate to maintain a minimum of 60 per cent of the country's land area under forest cover, Bhutan has established Bhutan for Life Initiative, with the objective to raise funds for the maintenance of protected areas and biological corridors.

He reported that Bhutan has established National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) as an authorized national focal point to liaise with International and Regional Organizations for humanitarian assistance and other support, Inter-Ministerial Taskforce at the Ministry level to Inter-Ministerial coordination and collaboration, and District Emergency Operation Centre at the district level to reach out the people in the districts and sub-district levels. He urged the leaders and experts of our region to further deepen cooperation in areas such as climate science, glaciology, ecosystem and biodiversity.

# Presentation - IV



**Hemant Harishchandra Kotalwar**

*Joint Secretary,*

*National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), India*

Hemant Harishchandra Kotalwar, Joint Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), India highlighted that during the BIMSTEC Leaders Retreat hosted by India in Goa on 17 October 2016, the member nations agreed to build on the existing capacities in the region and to explore the possibility of establishing partnerships with other regional and international entities in this sector of HADR. The idea was that BIMSTEC would develop a standardized and uniform protocol through joint exercises, training, workshops and sharing of experiences. This will create an effective disaster response mechanism for the region as a whole thereby ensuring that precious human lives are saved and the damage is minimized.

In this regard, he took the opportunity to share one of India's recent experiences. He referred to his country's experience of the recent cyclone *Fani* which is relevant because of its occurrence in the Bay of Bengal. *Fani*, a rare summer cyclone that hit eastern India in May 2019 was one of the strongest cyclones to have hit India in the last 20 years. Storm surges and powerful winds reaching 210 km per hour blew off roofs, damaged power lines and uprooted countless trees. The Cyclone was the longest the Bay of Bengal ever observed, and went on for 11 days in the sea and land put together. However, India was able to minimize casualties to 64 deaths, as compared to 10,000 in the same state in 1999. This is a small figure even when compared to cyclones and hurricanes of a similar intensity around the globe. So the Indian state of Odisha's ability to put such an effective disaster management plan in place and save thousands of lives is a learning experience. He referred to the four-pronged strategy consisting of:

- building relief infrastructure,
- accuracy of early warning systems,
- clear communication and
- effective coordination of groups developed by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), that have helped in minimizing the damage to life and property.

He mentioned that there was a clear command and control structure for disaster relief and there were clear protocols in place for carrying out relief operations. Secondly, it was important that the early warning system is accurate. The India Meteorological Department has built an effective service to predict the path, accurate timings of cyclone formation in the Bay of Bengal and when and where it will make landfall along India's coastline. This early warning system enabled the state to be disaster-ready and minimize loss of lives. It is then crucial that people follow the protocols in place when the warnings come in. Thirdly, there was a need for a clear communication plan. Before cyclone *Fani* hit, regular press briefings were made by officials to update people of the approaching cyclone. People were repeatedly advised over all forms of media not to panic and given clear "dos and don'ts". 2.6 million text messages, 43,000 volunteers, nearly 1,000 emergency workers, television commercials, coastal sirens, buses, police officers, and public address systems blared the same message on a loop, in local language, in very clear terms: "A cyclone is coming. Get to the shelters". This helped in the record evacuation of 1.2 million people to safe buildings.

In India, disaster management has seen a paradigm shift. Disaster Management Act 2005 provided the legal basis for the shift from a reactive, relief based approach to one of proactive disaster risk reduction, meticulous preparation, effective response and well thought out build back better program after a disaster. After the enactment of the Act, a multi-tiered institutional system consisting of national disaster management authority, headed by the Prime Minister, state disaster management authority headed by the respective Chief Ministers and the district disaster management authority headed by the respective district collector was created to coordinate the disaster management initiatives across the country. The National Policy on Disaster Management was then adopted in 2009. The national disaster management plan is framed in such a way that the Ministries, State governments and the people at the grass-root are able to understand it easily. While the national plan provides overall direction and sets out national goals, it is for the various stakeholders to develop their own specific disaster management plans, including separate response plans and standard operating procedures.

It is in this context, India has been taking initiatives under the auspices of BIMSTEC to share its experiences with other members of BIMSTEC. The Government of India hosted the first BIMSTEC Annual disaster management exercise in October 2017 in Delhi in order to strengthen the intergovernmental coordination effort to institutionalize regional cooperation on disaster response among the member countries. Indian Navy in conjunction with National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) will be conducting a HADR exercise for the coastal state of Tamil Nadu from 2-4 August 2019. During this exercise, 28 member states of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) had been invited as observers.

At the Deceleration of fourth BIMSTEC Summit held in Kathmandu from 30-31 August 2018, the Leaders agreed to set up an Inter-Governmental Expert Group to develop cooperation plans in the area of Disaster Management. India's focus was on developing standardized operations and response protocol so that a standardized and uniform set of procedure is applied within BIMSTEC Member countries to effectively support Disaster Management activities. He concluded his speech by saying that sharing best practices to extend knowledge and technology and lessons learnt among other member countries is required for greater coordination and cooperation.

# Presentation - V



**Lahpai Zau Goone**

*Member, Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS), Myanmar*

Lahpai Zau Goone, Member, Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS), focused his presentation on Myanmar's experience of disaster management and humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR). Myanmar is prone to all kinds of hazards, e.g., earthquake, tsunami, floods, etc. The existing risk can increase manifold due to unprecedented severe temperature rise and extreme weather events that have a tremendous impact on the climate change patterns in recent years. It is important to prepare for disaster response, rehabilitation and reconstruction. In recent years, Myanmar is also witnessing localized disasters, i.e., lightning and river erosion. During 2014-2017, lightning caused the loss of 175 lives. During the same period, Myanmar also experienced the loss of 261 lives due to riverbank erosion. The 2015 flood caused massive damages and the loss amounted to US\$ 1.5 billion. The worst ever disaster that hit the country in modern times was the Cyclone *Nargis* claiming the lives of more than 65,000 people and causing damages to property amounting to US\$ 4.1 billion. There has been a rise in human loss over the past decade primarily due to increased exposure to population.

He then spoke about the drivers of disaster risks. At the global level, the United Nations has identified 12 key drivers of disaster risks. Myanmar has also identified the comprehensive profile of vulnerability which are: poverty and inequality, rapid urbanization and migration, vulnerable population, deforestation, housing condition and limited access to communication.

The past events have clearly demonstrated the far-reaching detrimental impact of disaster on development endeavours. Therefore, the government in 2012 formed a committee to draft a national action plan known as Myanmar Action Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction (MAP on DRR 2017). It is a comprehensive and unified action plan for disaster risk reduction with prioritized interventions across Myanmar until 2020. With a long term vision and considering deep-rooted underlying drivers of disaster risk, it has set an overall target for 2030. This action plan covers not only natural hazards but also manmade disasters. It will be implemented through a people-centred and inclusive approach focusing on managing risks rather than disasters. The plan

has been developed under the guidance of national disaster management committee, which is headed by the vice president.

The action plan has identified thirty two priority actions under four pillars namely risk information and awareness; risk governance; risk mitigation, preparedness and response; and rehabilitation and reconstruction. Each priority action has identified objectives, activities, outputs, duration, lead agencies and supporting partners. The priority actions aim to strengthen policy framework and system for long term risk reduction. The number of development policies and interventions are at a nascent stage which offers a window of opportunity for disaster and climate risk informed development in avoiding creating new risks. Preparedness, disaster response, rehabilitation and reconstruction are key for addressing and assessing risks. Robust implementation, funding as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms have been identified for the MAP on DRR 2017. The priorities will be funded through internal as well as external sources. A multi-layered monitoring and evaluation mechanism has been formed in the various stages of the execution. To this effect, Myanmar has formulated a Natural Disaster Management Law.

While talking about the Myanmar climate change policy, he mentioned that there are nine guiding principles: sustainable development, precaution, prevention, environmental integrity, shared responsibility and cooperation, inclusiveness, good governance, climate justice and equity, gender equality and women's empowerment.

He then listed the measures for implementation. First, adopting and implementing laws and regulations to further enhance the implementation of actions under this policy is important. Second, establishing or strengthening existing institutions for the overall coordination, promotion, support, facilitation, and monitoring, evaluation and review of actions and results are necessary in order to enable the effective implementation of climate action, at a high level. Third, there is a need to allocate sufficient financial resources from the national and regional budget to implement climate adaptation and mitigation actions across all sectors. Fourth, undertaking and supporting capacity building activities to enhance the knowledge and skills of relevant stakeholders for effective and gender-responsive climate action, in a continuous, progressive and iterative manner, and establish new institutions and/or a capacity-building framework. Fifth, it is important to promote the collection, analysis and dissemination of real-time data and information on short, medium and long-term climate change impacts, trends and projections relating to all geographic regions. Sixth, ensuring transparency and accountability of all stakeholders through open decision-making is needed. Finally, it is important to monitor, evaluate and report the implementation and progress towards achieving the purpose of the climate change policy and strengthen the capacities of all stakeholders.



# Presentation – VI



**Mr Sudarshan Prasad Dhakal**

*Expert from Civil Society, Nepal*

At the outset of his presentation, Mr Sudarshan Prasad Dhakal, Expert from Civil Society, Nepal, provided a brief overview of the natural disaster of Nepal. He stated that like other countries of the region, Nepal is also a disaster-prone country. Due to various kinds of natural disasters in last eight years, twelve thousand six hundred eighty eight people died and one thousand ten people were missing. He informed that due to an earthquake on 25 April 2015, nine thousand people died, more than two thousand people were injured and thousands were made homeless. Fourteen districts were badly affected and the damage cost was about US\$ 8 billion. On 31 March 2019, a powerful rainstorm took place in two districts of southern Nepal and killed twenty nine people and injured more than one thousand people. Later it was identified as the first confirmed case of a tornado in Nepal. Recently, 30 people were killed, 37 were injured and atleast 38 people have gone missing in the incident of landslide and floods in Nepal. It also caused damages to 8,624 houses and nearly 402,000 people were affected.

He pointed out that a number of legal, institutional and policy frameworks have been already placed by the government. He added that the formulation of policy and legislative procedure on disaster issues in Nepal dates back to the early 1980s, and Natural Calamity Relief Act was enacted in 1982. Prior to 1982, rescue, relief as well as recovery works were carried out in an ad hoc basis primarily as social work. The Natural Calamity Relief Act in 1982 did perform a mission to formalize disaster response as a responsibility of the government to provide relief to the victims of the disaster-events and it designated authorities at the central region and district level to coordinate the rescue and relief efforts of various response agencies. The parliament of Nepal last year endorsed the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act, 2017 that formally replaced the Natural Calamity Relief Act 1982. This is more comprehensive and addresses the complex dynamics of all phases of disaster management. The act has made the provision of a National Council for Disaster Risks Reduction and Management (NCDRRM) under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. Now, the government is in the process of establishing a National Risks Reduction and Management Authority (NRRMA) under the Ministry of Home Affairs. The authority shall work under the direct oversight and control of the Executive Committee (EC). The EC shall be chaired by the Home Minister. The NRRMA will look after

all phases of disaster management in close cooperation and coordination with all DRR stakeholders as and when necessary. Currently, the government is going to finalize the disaster Risk Reduction and Management Regulations (DRRMR) to back up the act.

He also added that the first meeting of the National Council for Disaster Risks Reduction and Management (NCDRRM) was held upon the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. The meeting endorsed the long-awaited Disaster Risk Reduction National Policy 2018 and Disaster Risk Reduction National Strategic Action Plan (2018-2030). The National Strategic Action Plan is in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

He also put some recommendations related to infrastructure development in case of disasters that affect two countries or more than two countries. Firstly, highway roads and high dam projects which hinder the nearby settlement should be taken care of. Secondly, there is a need to balance the regional environment collectively. Thirdly, BIMSTEC member countries need to have a coordinated emergency response mechanism.



# Open Discussion



Col Towhidul Ahmed, afwc, psc, Colonel Staff, Armed Forces Division, said that the Armed Forces Division, Bangladesh deals with the involvement of the military in any kind of disasters on behalf of the armed forces. He gave the audience some insights about what the Armed forces do in times of the natural disaster. Last February, the Bangladesh Armed forces had conducted an exercise in Singapore named CORAS 2019, which was purely related to response to the earthquake situation there. Bangladesh had taken the lead among more than 40 countries participating. This year in October, Bangladesh is going to organize the biggest earthquake response exercise named “DRIE (Disaster Response Information Exchange)”. Bangladesh has been organizing this exercise since 2010, and through this exercise they have developed a system on how the military forces effort can be integrated with their civilian counterpart. He also said that in Bangladesh armed forces are involved in every part of the disaster response system. Also, the National Disaster Management Committee of Bangladesh is led by the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Col Ahmed also highlighted that the main goal of the armed forces in terms of response is the coordinated response. The core duty of managing disaster is in the hands of the Bangladesh Government and the military helps the civilian counterpart in completing the task. Bangladesh has given high importance on the communication aspect. And they are developing a communication system called ‘DRECS’ (Disaster Emergency Response Communication System). With the help of the Japanese government, this system is being developed so that there can be coordinated efforts, even for the disasters in the farthest part of the country.

He concluded by saying that disasters have no boundary and if the disasters are not managed properly, they can become a breeding ground for social problems. So, a disaster in one country can have an effect on other countries as well. So, there is a need for a coordinated system developed within the BIMSTEC framework so that the countries can respond to the disasters facing the region collectively.

Air Commodore Mridha Md Ekramuzzaman, Bangladesh Air Force stated that Bangladesh Air Force has always been ready to handle the disaster. They are involved in disaster management, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief programme. Moreover, they are keeping their helicopters and transport aircraft stand by always. Thus, if any warning comes from the government then air force takes the most leading role to reach the disaster-prone area at the quickest possible time. He noted that sometimes they face problems regarding interoperability when they operate with neighbouring countries through the multinational programme. Therefore, interoperability becomes an issue sometimes and mitigating these interoperability problems will help to respond quickly. In this respect, he recommended to the BIMSTEC member countries to plan for an interoperability cognition programme for the purpose of military operations and air force operation.



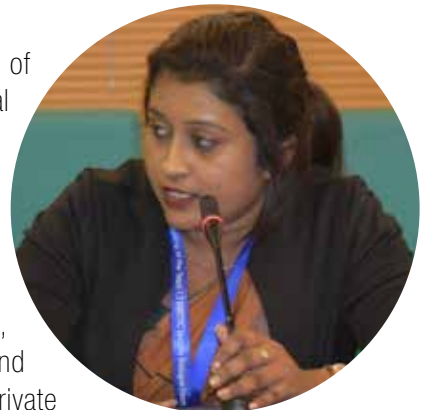
Ambassador Mahbub-Uz Zaman, Secretary (Asia & Pacific), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh touched upon some selected issues raised by the presenters during the session. He shared that there are some common strands among the BIMSTEC countries. The countries are located in a seismically active region and face periodic volume of earthquake, flood and droughts. Disaster management is a common challenge for the countries thus there is a need for regional cooperation. He referred to the Indian presenter's idea on standardized procedures and response mechanism. He added that lessons can be learnt from other countries too like Japan's response to earthquake. He also highlighted some excerpts from the Bangladeshi presenters.



Ambassador Zaman mentioned that the Prime Minister of Bangladesh identified three clusters in BIMSTEC i.e sustainable development, security and stability, and people-to-people contact. Then he spoke about the non-traditional challenges faced by Bangladesh. He opined that environmental disaster and climate change vulnerabilities affect all countries. It is also a human security concern as dignity, survival and livelihood of people are threatened. There exists a correlation between environment, disaster and poverty.

Ambassador Zaman mentioned two important conventions to which Bangladesh is a signatory state, the Climate Change Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Convention on Biological Diversity specifically mentions that prior informed consent needs to be taken. He also mentioned about biopiracy by some developed countries and suggested that developing countries need to take collective action. In this regard, it was crucial to follow the Rio principle. There should be common but differentiated responsibilities as the developed countries are mainly responsible for the pollution and the developing countries can only adapt and adjust to the situation which requires a lot of funds.

Ms Sudharma Karunaratna, Assistant Secretary (Defence), Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka said that Sri Lanka was a lucky country in terms of natural disaster but it has changed now due to the effects of climate change. Within one year Sri Lanka faced many floods, landslides and drought conditions. In 2004, it had Tsunami, fortunately it has not been repeated yet. With that she imparted some recommendations in light of what Sri Lanka is currently doing to improve the disaster management system. One is introducing the complex system which has many interacting components like early and optimal public warning systems, measures to counter the building of illegal settlements near flood-prone areas and prevent deforestation. Disaster response and mitigation in collaboration with the private sector, local communities and militaries will decrease the loss of livelihood,



for example SENSEi networks and cell broadcasting system. In case of urban planning, it is important to create the science to help minimize these issues with salient architectural features and to introduce the central mechanism in collaboration with several organizations belonging to different sectors in order to collect information and develop disaster-free service plans.

Dr M Mahfuz Kabir, Research Director, BIISS, Bangladesh said that five countries viz., Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand are the top BIMSTEC countries affected by climate change as per the Global Climate Risk Index 2019. BIMSTEC countries can have a common voice in the international





forum on climate change negotiations. He also mentioned that BIMSTEC countries are now doing disaster management in silo manner. Therefore, there should be a coordinated approach in this regard.

**Mr Md. Shamsul Haque**, Director General (SAARC & BIMSTEC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh said that there has been a lot of discussion on natural disasters, but he had expected some discussion on man-made disasters. He said that people cannot manage the disasters they can only manage the impacts of them. He also said that discussing the impacts of disasters and disaster-led displacement can be helpful for the policymakers. He also highlighted the issue of the form and nature of coalition on disaster response under the BIMSTEC umbrella. He said that the disaster-led displacement is now an emerging issue and there is a forum on this based in Geneva. So, BIMSTEC can learn from that forum and borrow from the best practices of other organizations in order to develop its own mechanism for managing the impacts of disasters.





# Remarks by the Chair



**Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc**

*Director General, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Bangladesh*

Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc, Director General, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) at the outset shared one of his personal experiences with the audience. He said that he was participating in a course on disaster management in the United States of America (USA) where he saw that the disaster management document of Bangladesh was being used as a guideline. He said that in the past, Bangladesh was unprepared regarding what needed to be done before, during and after disasters. Natural disasters held back Bangladesh's economic development process backwards in many instances. But Bangladesh is learning rapidly and is now being taken as a success story in many parts of the world as far as disaster management and disaster response is concerned. Academicians, researchers and experts from different countries often enquire about the story behind the success of Bangladesh in this sector. General Rahman opined that he always refers to two things. The first is visionary leadership. He shared the quote of one of his professors who believed that vision without action is a dream. On the other hand, action without vision is a waste of time. But action with vision can change the world. He stated that Bangladesh is passing through a complete vision-oriented phase under the visionary leadership of the present Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The second reference he made was the resilient character of the people of Bangladesh. He elaborated on this point by highlighting few real-life examples. He felt that this characteristic is present among all the people in this part of the world. General Rahman was optimistic that this resilient character can make this region stronger than any other part of the world. He concluded with the hope that as BIMSTEC holds more than one-fifth population; as a region it should also become one of the top 5 economies of the world combined together.

# Summary of Recommendations

Over the two-day long “Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum”, distinguished speakers, presenters, discussants and the participants deliberated on various crucial security concerns for the Bay of Bengal region and for the BIMSTEC member countries. They have put forward significant suggestions and recommendations to address these security challenges. Below is a summary of those suggestions/recommendations delineated according to the themes of the Forum.

## **Working Session 1: Threat of Terrorism and Violent Extremism, and Responses by BIMSTEC Countries**

1. To deal with the issue of terrorism and violent extremism, community mobilization is important. Multi level strategy is also imperative for countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism (PVE).
2. As terrorism is international in nature, international cooperation is important. In this respect, BIMSTEC is a good platform to identify and devise collective strategy.
3. BIMSTEC countries need to cooperate in intelligence sharing and sharing of best practices and promote awareness programme. Speakers also emphasized on sharing of knowledge among member states.
4. To address the threats of terrorism and violent extremism, BIMSTEC member states need to strengthen and empower the moderate voices, promote national harmony, address ethno violence, enable educational institutions to promote religious harmony, view extremism in a broader context, enhance free discussion among intellectual and government institutions and introduce a well-articulated social media policy.
5. For Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism countries need to address the root causes of terrorism without pointing to any specific religion or ethnicity, and stimulate the value of diversity, tolerance and inclusiveness in the society.
6. Terrorism and violent extremism is beyond any border or particular region because of its transnational nature. Common understanding on the concept of terrorism needs to be formulated by member states.
7. The comprehensive approach of BIMSTEC should be based on the established norms such as the UN Global Counter-terrorism Strategy and other related conventions including the BIMSTEC Convention signed in 2009.

## **Working Session 2: Maritime Security (Capacity Building, Maritime Connectivity, etc)**

1. Instead of geography-centric views on oceans, member states should adopt the policy of ‘think globally and act locally’ to mitigate the maritime challenges.

2. Holistic as well as common approach should be taken to ensure maritime security.
3. For maritime security, development of port is very important. Rights of land-locked countries in BIMSTEC, especially, access to ports of member countries under UNCLOS to be protected.
4. Speakers recommended for addressing the issue of over exploitation of fishes. It is also imperative for countries to think of common fisheries conservation.
5. Maritime security need to be connected with the economic and social development of the people of the Bay of Bengal region.
6. Proposal has been made to establish maritime institutions, blue economy centre, maritime university, organizations of oceanography and marine research centers in the BIMSTEC countries.
7. 'Concept of land-bridge'- which refers to the intermodal connection between land and sea has been placed.
8. There is a need for BIMSTEC countries to cooperate on marine resources accounting, especially, since the seas are facing challenges of ocean pollution and acidification.
9. Joint patrol once in a year among member countries may be explored. To develop common response mechanism in case of maritime terrorism.
10. To adopt common policies to protect ocean health, safeguard the ocean resources and take measures against marine pollution.
11. For the economic development, speakers stressed on importance on blue economy, sustainable development of ocean-based economy without degrading environment. In this context, they explored the idea of establishing a blue economy research centre.
12. Real time intelligence sharing is important in countering cross-boundary maritime crimes.
13. Speakers emphasized on completing negotiation on Coastal Shipping Agreement and SOP.

### **Working Session 3: Traditional Security Threats with Emphasis on Cyber Security and Transnational Crimes (Illicit Trade and Trafficking in Arms, Narcotics Drugs Smuggling, Human Trafficking, etc.)**

1. Clear communication among the BIMSTEC member states is important and there is a need for an effective coordination of groups.
2. Enforcement of drug control strategic plan is important as online platform is being used to communicate between drug suppliers and consumers.
3. For effectively stopping the human trafficking, countries of origin, transit and destination should deepen cooperation by information sharing.
4. It was recommended to increase technological knowhow and build awareness to address cyber security problems.
5. Financial investment in this sector, enhancing intelligence capacity and economic development were also recommended.
6. Proposed to increase collaboration among the maritime universities of the BIMSTEC member states.
7. Stressed on collective approach to combat various non-traditional security threats such as illicit

trade, trafficking in arms, drugs, human trafficking, money laundering, climate change, forced displacement, non-communicable diseases etc.

#### **Working Session 4: Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR)**

1. Urged the BIMSTEC countries to improve cooperation in the area of climate science and ecology as well as disaster management.
2. Infrastructure development as well as proper maintenance of natural resources is imperative for BIMSTEC countries.
3. Emergency response capacity should be developed.
4. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR) should be viewed both from traditional and non-traditional security perspectives.
5. Enhance cooperation between civil and military institutions.
6. NGOs and local population also need to be involved. It should be done at strategic and tactical levels.
7. Need of a well-established structure in the BIMSTEC system so that there can be a coordinated response for any disaster in any country.
8. There should be some sort of task force for cooperation on disaster.
9. There is a forum on “Displacement from Disaster” in Europe and BIMSTEC can learn from that forum.
10. Five countries, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand are the top BIMSTEC countries affected by climate change as per Global Climate Risk Index 2019. BIMSTEC countries can have a common voice in the international forum in climate change negotiation.
11. BIMSTEC countries are now addressing disaster management in ‘Silo’ manner. They rather should adopt coordinated approach in this region.

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- **BIISS Journal (Quarterly)**

- **Bangladesh Foreign Policy Survey (Quarterly)**

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