

EVENT REPORT

International Conference on **Security & Prosperity In The Bay Of Bengal**

Prepared By
CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH

Date: November 29 to 30, 2022

Venue: Le Meridien, Kochi

About the Event: Centre for Public Policy Research, Kochi (CPPR) and Friedrich Naumann Foundation South Asia (FNF) organised an 'International Conference on Security and Prosperity in the Bay of Bengal' on November 29 - 30, 2022 at Hotel Le Meridien, Kochi. The Conference aimed at invigorating discussions around non-traditional security aspects in the Bay of Bengal. The sessions of the Conference were planned such that there would be in-depth conversations on conventional and non-conventional security areas such as Energy Security, Trade and Investment, Technology and Innovation, Blue Economy, Climate Change, and Human Security by diplomats, academicians, government officials, commentators, industry experts, media personalities, etc. The Conference is expected to be an important milestone in deepening cooperation in the Bay of Bengal.

Day 1: November 29, 2022 | Inaugural Session



Dr. D Dhanuraj, Chairman, CPPR, Kochi began his welcome address by mentioning CPPR's expertise in International Relations and experience of over a dozen international conferences which have been conducted with a series of multilateral engagements, particularly focussing on maritime security and maritime trade. Regarding the Bay of Bengal, he mentioned that the Bay with an area of 2mn sq km is the largest in the world and a vital trade route with a combined GDP of \$3.7 trillion. Thus, the region is a critical theatre of economic growth in the Indian Ocean. He further added that the region is a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia with vital resources such as unexploited oil on the Myanmar coast along with the proximity to the Middle East oil sources. In the context that the region is situated among regional blocs such as the SAARC and ASEAN, Dr. Dhanuraj outlined that the conference has seven sessions which also include a plenary session on "Bay of Bengal as a pivot to Southeast Asia". He also lauded the role of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in co-organising this Conference, and its association

with CPPR since 2005, in training and mentoring the CPPR team. He concluded the address by welcoming all the dignitaries and quoted PM Narendra Modi, stating “Today when our region is facing the challenges of health and economic security, solidarity is the need of the hour”.



Mr. Frank Hoffman delivered the introductory remarks for the Conference and mentioned that the close association of FNF and CPPR is bound by liberal values. He concluded by outlining the conference’s goal to continue fostering a regional network of experts in South Asia.





Mr. N Ramachandran IPS (Retd) kicked off the inaugural and keynote session of the programme, highlighting the relevance of the Bay of Bengal. He stated that during his tenure, he had the opportunity to look at national security from a developmental perspective, while also noting that the Bay of Bengal region hosts one-fifth of the world's population. According to him, security, if not handled properly, will have adverse consequences and thus security, business and development are not mutually exclusive, they can be complementary. The speaker also mentioned that the Bay of Bengal is becoming increasingly relevant in the spheres of economy and strategic competition. Politics, competition and rivalries are part of geopolitical dynamics and some of these may be useful, but we also need to be careful at the same time. Security is essential for economic growth and development in the national and international arena. In the Indian context, we have been a victim of terror with a series of cases such as the 26/11 sea-based attack, clubbed with crimes such as arms smuggling, human trafficking and money laundering. Stakeholders involved in the security domain only think from a land-based perspective and the threats from the seafront are neglected. Sea-based vulnerabilities are a threat to India as well as other littoral countries. India's coastline of 7500 km has increased porosity during the monsoon season. One of the major worries of the Indian government is that the uninhabited islands in the Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nicobar group of islands could be used by criminals and smugglers. These are aggravated by issues such as the refugee crisis, illegal migration, trafficking of stateless persons and more. Large-scale seizures of drug consignments are also witnessed in ports, and ships on high seas and thus he highlighted the role of every state in ocean governance. He concluded by mentioning the role of regional blocs, such as BIMSTEC in maritime security and also said that 'security is a shared responsibility of all and thus all Bay of Bengal nations must pool resources for the same'.



Mr. Sujeet Kumar, Member of Parliament (MP), in his felicitation address stated that we have moved on from the hostilities of the Cold War in the past and that the world has become more peaceful and secure while also being multipolar at the same time. He stated that today the world order has shifted to the Indo-Pacific and that for ages, India had maritime links to South East Asia and the Bay of Bengal was once called the Chola lake. He also stated that BIMSTEC is the ideal platform to provide peace, stability and prosperity in the region of the Bay of Bengal. He quoted PM Narendra Modi's statement on BIMSTEC: "BIMSTEC not only connects South and South-East Asia, but also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal". He also underlined the challenges faced by the BIMSTEC in meeting its expectations such as political instability, insurgency tendencies, and communal and regional conflicts. In conclusion, he called for the ethos of the SAGAR doctrine to be followed in letter and spirit along with enhanced synergy and complementarity with the neighbours.



His Excellency Mr. Nitirooge Phoneprasert, Consul General of the Royal Thai Consulate, Chennai, began his remarks by referring to the Bay of Bengal as a significant subregion in the Indo-Pacific through which one-fourth of the world trade moves every year. Regarding Thailand, he mentioned that the nation has taken pro-BIMSTEC roles for a prosperous, resilient and open BIMSTEC. He also emphasised the role of connectivity in the prosperity of the Bay of Bengal and mentioned that the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway, once completed, will be crucial for maritime connectivity. The speaker highlighted Thailand’s willingness in taking a lead role in the BIMSTEC master plan, the coastal security agreement and enhancing transnational connectivity. He also stressed on the benefit of the bio-circular realm or BCG economy model, a flagship model combining technology and innovation for long-term growth and resilience. He concluded his speech by reiterating that Thailand is determined to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth that benefits all in the Bay of Bengal.



Book Release: “Maritime Security Complexes of the Indo-Pacific Region”

Mr. Sujeet Kumar, MP, India launched the collective research publication titled “**Maritime Security Complexes of the Indo-Pacific Region**”, co-authored by Dr. Vijay Sakhuja and **Dr. Lawrence Prabhakar at the event**. Dr. Lawrence Prabhakar, Board of Advisors (CPPR) and also the co-author of the book recommended the same for policymakers, policy researchers and academicians for their research assistance. Dr. Lawrence concluded by mentioning that the publication revolved around the theme of the Indo-Pacific and the various regions within the wider Indo-Pacific while also discussing today’s power transition at the geopolitical level.

Day 2: November 30, 2022

SESSION 1: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE BAY OF BENGAL



The first session on the topic “**Prospects and Challenges of the Blue Economy in the Bay of Bengal**” identified the importance of marine governance and highlighted the relevance of the blue economy amongst Bay of Bengal stakeholders. The session was moderated by **Dr. Mini Shekharan, Associate Professor (Fisheries Management) at the School of Industrial Fisheries, Cochin University of Science & Technology (CUSAT)**. The speakers of the session consisted of Dr. Sevvandi Jayakody, Chair Professor to the Department of Aquaculture and Fisheries of the Wayamba University of Sri Lanka, **Dr. P. Krishnan, Director of Bay of Bengal Intergovernmental Organization (BOBP-IGO)** and **Dr. Abdul Hanan Waheed, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA)**.

The moderator of the session, **Dr. Mini Shekharan**, opened the session by mentioning the importance of a sustainable ocean economy, where ocean health is said to be the top priority globally. She mentioned that the definition by the World Bank outlines the prospects of the blue economy and that the vast use of ocean resources, imported livelihoods and preserving the health of oceans, are all very relevant within the blue economy conversation today. The speaker then stated that priority has to be given to areas of prosperity in the Bay of Bengal, where the sectors that can be scaled up are maritime trade and supply chains, maritime transport, shipping, coastal tourism, marine biotechnology, marine minerals and the development of sustainable processes. She introduced the three speakers of the session and invited them to share with the participants of the Conference their perspectives on the prospects and challenges of blue economy in the Bay of Bengal region.

The first speaker of the session was **Dr. Abdul Hanan Waheed** who kicked off the discussion by pointing out the economic potential of the Bay of Bengal, which amounted to \$16 trillion including Vietnam's GDP. He commented on how the economic size of the Bay of Bengal is expected to grow to the same level as the BRICS did in 2006. The speaker went on to discuss how the region is particularly vulnerable to extreme climate events such as storms, cyclones and heavy rainfall, climate-induced displacement, increasing degradation, habitual destruction and marine pollution. Dr. Waheed pointed out how fish has become more expensive and valuable than oil and gas due to the threat of decreasing fish stocks across the globe. He also added that sustainable ocean economies and ocean health must be aligned with SDGs to facilitate political discourse. He concluded by referencing that "we are on a highway to climate hell with our foot on the accelerator", as mentioned by Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The second speaker of the session, Dr. P Krishnan, identified India's numerous efforts within blue economy sectors. He mentioned the six pillar framework pertaining to coastal marine spatial planning, tourism, marine fisheries, aquaculture, technology, services, skill development, logistics, infrastructure and shipping, including trans-shipments, offshore energy, security, strategic dimensions, and international engagement. The speaker predominantly focused on the need to build and prioritise sustainable criteria for the blue economy, as seen within the European Union. He pointed out that the region has the largest proportion of artisanal fisheries with 22 ports, yet South Asia's contribution of fish is on the decline. He mentioned the widening gender gap within the fisheries sector and emphasised the need for regional cooperation at the multi-sectoral level. He then brought up the need for strong collaboration in research which would equate to creating a strong, dependable, inclusive and reliable policy presence within the blue economy sector. Dr. P Krishnan concluded by mentioning that "data is the oil for fisheries management, where data and technological advancements should be key within sensors for water quality, fish status, mariculture management and maritime governance".

Dr. Sevvandi Jayakody, the third speaker of the session kicked off the discussions by emphasising the importance of the fisheries sector in the conversation on sustainable finances of the Indian Ocean and blue economy. She proceeded to mention that various marine species are going extinct, posing the question of why nations within the region are aiming to go on a global level instead of aiming towards achieving blue economy goals on a regional level. She primarily focused on the need to collaborate with one another to target challenges with a regional focus. Dr. Jayakody then went on to highlight the importance of data within the conversation on the blue economy by emphasising the importance of analysing data on a national and regional scale. The speaker went on to mention the need for a comprehensive regional forum with transboundary initiatives that also highlight the resilience building of coastal communities, where policy words must be used in accordance with their relevance within the blue economy (and its respective sectors). Dr. Jayakody concluded the session by mentioning that business as usual cannot help foster transboundary cooperation within blue economy sectors, as there is an urgent requirement for grid policies with new developments, transboundary initiatives alongside real-time data sharing and governance that looks at facilitating effective policies.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1. The region must prioritise collaboration and cooperation to lessen the impact of human activity on coastal development and focus on addressing non-traditional security challenges to the maritime domain.

2. There is an urgent need for a multi-sectoral analysis when it comes to implementing frameworks pertaining to the blue economy.
3. Policymakers within the region should look to foster maritime development while preserving, utilising and prioritising resources alongside inculcating sustainable ocean management.

SESSION 2: TOWARDS ENHANCED ENERGY COOPERATION IN THE BAY OF BENGAL



The second session was moderated by **Dr. Madhu P Pillai, Advisor, CPPR, in India**. The session was on enhancing energy cooperation in the Bay of Bengal. The speakers of the session were **Mr. Narasimhan Santhanam, Co-Founder & Director - Energy Alternatives India); Ms. Gauri Singh, Deputy Director General, International Renewable Energy Agency; Admiral Jayanath Colombage (Retd), former Foreign Secretary, Government of Sri Lanka and Mr. Needrup Zangpo, Executive Director of Bhutan Media Foundation**. Various themes such as the scope of renewable energy, carbon sequestration, climate change, energy security, energy diplomacy, and dependency on fossil fuels were explored during the session.

The moderator for the session, **Dr. Madhu P Pillai**, introduced the topic for discussion. He shared that the Bay of Bengal is moving very fast and attracting global attention. While mentioning the topic for discussion, he stated that energy is one of the key sectors that can bring all other factors together. He mentioned the immense resource for cooperation in conventional fossil fuel that the Bay of Bengal region holds, and emphasised the importance to be given in developing the regional grid system. Dr. Pillai concluded by touching upon the potential of renewable resources and the usage of nuclear power in the Bay of Bengal.

The first speaker of the session was **Mr. Narasimhan Santhanam**. Mr. Santhanam commented on the topic of discussion by highlighting the learnings from his work. He stated that the total territorial carbon in the world is about 5-6 billion tonnes and that the total carbon sequestered

in the ocean is 38000 billion tonnes. While speaking about renewable energy, Mr. Santhanam shared that despite huge potential, very little is happening. He stated that there is no offshore wind today in the Bay of Bengal region, the wave energy potential is not as high as that in the north Atlantic and the tidal potential is there but is not fully developed. Talking from a climate change perspective, Mr. Santhanam mentioned how livestock consumption leads to methane emissions. Mr. Santhanam concluded by mentioning that substituting a larger part of meat with fish can be one of the carbon mitigation strategies as fish, unlike other livestock, has a lower methane count.

The second speaker of the session was **Ms. Gauri Singh**, who focussed on the significance of renewable energy and energy transition in the Bay of Bengal Region. Ms. Singh stated that there is a strong political momentum around the energy transition and that it is important to focus on pathways to enable the shift to pre-industrial levels of carbon. She also shed light on how the Russia - Ukraine Crisis has added an element of energy security and that energy security has become crucial in countries looking at renewables more seriously. While talking about energy transition, Ms. Singh stated that the shift cannot and won't happen overnight and that it is important to realise the technologies that are needed to enable the energy transition. To conclude, Ms. Singh added that there are already regional grid connections between countries in the region and that feasibility studies are being done to connect India to the GCC grid and India to the Mediterranean grid.

Admiral Jayanath Colombage (Retd), the third speaker of the session shared his thoughts on the topic of discussion from an energy security and strategic cooperation perspective. Admiral Colombage in his opening remarks highlighted that energy security and cooperation are at the centre stage along with other topics such as national security development. He stated that in the foreseeable future, the use of fossil fuels and hydrocarbons will keep continuing and that achieving the targets set for net zero emissions seems challenging. While talking about the Russia-Ukraine crisis, Admiral Colombage stated that the targeted sanctions on Russia had unintended consequences in the Bay of Bengal region, such as the price hike of oil affecting the peripheral countries. The lack of exploitation of seabed hydrocarbons was also discussed. He concluded by sharing the importance of enhancing cooperation in energy by stating that most countries do not have the capacity and resources to exploit the resources and that it's important to collaborate and identify resources as regional commons.

The final speaker of the session was **Mr. Needrup Zangpo**, who talked about energy cooperation from a Bhutanese perspective. He stated that Bhutan is a carbon-negative country and that the constitution requests the government to give 60% of the land as a forest reserve. He highlighted how Bhutan, despite being carbon negative, is one of the few countries in the region heavily impacted by climate change with rivers shrinking and hydro energy power capability going down. While moving forward with the discussion, he stated that geopolitics comes into play with energy cooperation in the region. He concluded by stating that the landlocked countries have to gain from the wealth of Bay of Bengal littorals and vice versa and that there needs to be a mechanism to transcend geopolitical tensions in energy cooperation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1. BIMSTEC can act as a suitable platform to host the Bay of Bengal's inclusive maritime

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- strategy, aiming to promote transboundary grids as one of the core areas for regional cooperation.
2. India can play a pivotal role in facilitating the process of transboundary energy grids alongside promoting multinational free trade of energy.
 3. The need of the hour is to collaborate and identify resources as regional commons.

SESSION 3: FOSTERING REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TRADE AND INVESTMENT



The third session was moderated by **Dr. R P Pradhan, Associate Professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, KK Birla, Goa Campus, India**. The speakers for the session were **Mr. Madhurjya Kumar Dutta, Director Trade and Investment Facilitation Department, Mekong Institute** and **Mr. Md. Mosharaf Hossain, Director (Administration and Trade & Investment Division), BIMSTEC**. The session looked at the importance of multilateral cooperation in enhancing trade connectivity and highlighted the role of BIMSTEC as a regional organisation in the Bay of Bengal Region.

The moderator Dr. R P Pradhan mentioned that the Bay of Bengal has the possibility of connecting people in seven countries. He stated that as long as the borders are open, the region is more likely to be prosperous. He mentioned that ASEAN and the European Union were success stories in terms of trade connectivity and that the connecting waters of the Bay of Bengal can be looked at as a ray of hope.

The session began with the first speaker **Mr. Madhurjya Kumar Dutta** who focused on trade and connectivity in the Mekong subregion. Mr. Dutta stated that the Mekong subregion has emerged as a successful model of cooperation in the world. Under the Greater Mekong subregion, there are 14 sub-regional frameworks in place. In regards to the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Programme, Mr. Dutta added that connectivity has been at the forefront of the GMS program and

that before 1994, it was difficult for these nations to assemble and build competitiveness. He also mentioned the Act East Policy of India under which India is looking for deeper cooperation with Southeast Asian countries. Despite having a huge trade deficit between India and ASEAN, Mr. Dutta highlighted that it can provide scope for future trade relations. He also stated that Northeast India could play a key role in connecting India with Southeast Asia. In regards to funding for the GMS Programme, Mr. Dutta explained that for the GMS programme, a major part of the funding was from the Asian Development Bank. He also added that the very purpose of connectivity in the Mekong region is to create a transport corridor, which inevitably becomes an economic corridor.

The second speaker for the session, **Mr. Md Mosharaf Hossain**, reflected on his experience as the Director, (Administration and Trade & Investment Division), BIMSTEC. He began by stating that the Bay of Bengal and BIMSTEC are interchangeably used, but initially, it was BIST - EC and that when BIMSTEC was set up in 1997 the objective was to create economic development. He stated that the trade negotiation committee has met twenty-one times and that there are six working groups to negotiate on trade. In regards to the biggest achievement of BIMSTEC as a regional organisation, he mentioned that the signing of the BIMSTEC Charter during the last BIMSTEC summit was a major achievement. He also shed light on a recently published BIMSTEC master plan that identified 267 projects which require a budget of about \$124 billion. He stated that the biggest challenge was implementation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Connectivity within trade and investment in the region exists as 3 pillars - transport infrastructure, institutional connectivity, and people-to-people connectivity. The region must look into the development of these pillars to further concretise them within the trade and investment space.
2. Special economic zones must be developed in the region, where collaborative efforts can aid in enhancing connectivity within mutual economic and transport corridors.

SESSION 4: HARNESSING COOPERATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE BAY OF BENGAL



The fourth session on the topic “**Harnessing Cooperation For Environmental Sustainability In The Bay of Bengal**” identified the challenges posed by climate change and rising sea levels within the region, alongside addressing the critical areas that threaten environmental sustainability alongside calling for a strengthened consensus for regional cooperation in the Bay of Bengal. The session was moderated by **Ms. Sharon Susan Koshy, Research Associate, Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR)**. The speakers of the session were **Dr. S A Naidu, Project Scientist-II, Ministry of Earth Sciences-National Centre for Coastal Research (MoES-NCCR)** and **Mr. Ibrahim Naeem, Director General of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of Maldives**.

The moderator of the session, **Ms. Sharon Susan Koshy**, kickstarted the discussion by mentioning that the region is far from achieving a change in global temperature under 1.5 degrees Celsius. She pointed out that small fisherman communities have to be given due consideration when it comes to policy formation and changes, where implementation of a bottom-up approach may seem more beneficial on a regional scale. Additionally, the moderator commented on the rise in the climate change discourse, where she mentioned the need for the panel to discuss climate-induced threats, the impact of deep-sea trawling, marine litter and plastic pollution below and over water, with attention being paid to the livelihoods of those involved in the blue economy and Bay of Bengal. She proceeded to introduce the two speakers of the session and invited them to share with the participants of the conference their perspectives on regional cooperation to foster environmental sustainability in the Bay of Bengal.

The first speaker, **Dr. SA Naidu** jumpstarted the discussion by mentioning the need to strengthen various tenets of the maritime sector, such as ocean accounting, blue economy, mariculture and more, where plankton blooms, microplastics, marine litter, piracy and IUU fishing act as key factors of environmental and marine degradation. Dr. Naidu emphasised on the ocean remaining as one of the largest carbon sinks. However, he pointed out that the oceans are being deoxygenated - hence the carbon is being emitted, and temperature is being trapped, thus acting as a key facilitator of global warming and ocean heating. Additionally, Dr. Naidu mentioned that acidification within the ocean impacts the coral reefs, with rising atmospheric CO₂ levels having consequences on ocean carbon processes, global climate budgets and climate variability. The speaker emphasised on how oceans are warming, glaciers are melting, sea levels are rising, and the vicious cycle continues. He mentioned that the unwanted growth of plankton, fish being driven out of their natural habitat, rising plastic pollution and declining fish population acts as a challenge to the region, alongside waging gaps within the environmental sustainability dialogue. Dr. Naidu concluded by mentioning that there is a need to strengthen various tenets of the ocean, such as ocean accounting, blue economy, and mariculture, alongside facilitation. The development of research and development, new technologies, bioplastics, community engagement and regional cooperation alongside collaboration is required.

The second speaker, **Mr. Ibrahim Naeem**, pointed out that sea level rise is related to coral bleaching, ocean acidification, saline intrusion and coastal erosion. He mentioned that the region can expect more plastic in the oceans than fish by 2050 if the region continues forward on this path. The speaker highlighted the impacts of overfishing, Illegal and Unregulated fishing and deep sea trawling: mentioning that these activities are key players in negatively impacting aquatic life, marine habitats, coastal communities and livelihoods, alongside the economy. Mr. Naeem went on to mention that food and water security is being threatened due to the marine environment being dumped with garbage, where changing weather and climate patterns, natural

disasters, low resilience coastal areas, depleting coastal infrastructure and livelihood loss are relevant challenges that must be addressed via regional cooperation with the Bay of Bengal. The speaker pointed out that working together is crucial for the conversation and is the need of the hour. The speaker mentioned the example of the Maldives, pointing out that the Green Fields initiative in the Maldives looked to adopt protocols to monitor the reefs alongside calling for citizen science initiatives. Here, he mentioned that citizen activities are highly controlled with governmental clearances and screenings, where there is a high level of governance in tackling a clean and thriving ocean system. He mentioned that the region requires strategies of mutual understanding and cooperation where the region must work together to tackle maritime safety issues of IUU and microplastics. Mr. Naeem proceeded to bring up the importance of early warning and prevention being vital to curb the frequency of natural disasters that require regional cooperation. Mr. Naeem concluded by mentioning the requirement of a marine management strategy where regional consensus is vital. He mentioned that within the regional and global conversation, there is a need to look into the health of sea beds and coastal forests to reduce sealine intrusion.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1. Coastal communities have to be a part of an inclusive sustainability-focused policy formation dialogue, with coastal resilience and mitigation being prioritised.
2. Science and policy need to work together to target coral reefs, mangroves and sea beds and further analyse other vulnerable aspects of ocean life.
3. There is a dire need to look into data scientifically in order to target and aid effective and efficient policy making.

SESSION 5: ADDRESSING HUMAN SECURITY CHALLENGES THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS.



The fifth session was moderated by **Prof. (Dr.) Joshua Thomas, Erudite Distinguished Fellow (International Relations), CPPR**. The session was on addressing human security challenges through institutional mechanisms. The session consisted of three speakers namely, **Mr. Sanjay Gathia, Independent analyst, civic rights and development consultant based in Thailand; Mohamed Hoodh Ibrahim, Climate Risk Analyst, Asian Development Bank; and Prof. (Dr.) Lawrence S Prabhakar, Advisor, CPPR**.

Prof. (Dr.) Joshua Thomas kickstarted the session by pointing out that human security is a contested concept. It is most inclusive in character and most global in its space and scope. He mentioned that the UNSC has taken serious efforts with respect to human security and that the human security report and handbook prepared by UNDP was fascinating with its salient features such as universality and people centricity. In reference to the Bay of Bengal, Prof. Joshua Thomas stated that it lies at the intersection of South and Southeast Asia in which China is competing with India on one side and the USA is challenging China on the other side. He added that there are different movements in the region such as migration from different facets, refugee crisis, movement of trade, commerce and connectivity and movement of ideas and movement of sub-regional cooperation. The speaker concluded by mentioning that the Bay of Bengal regional dialogue can be held on the sidelines of the Indo-Pacific Dialogue and also called for setting up a Centre for Human Security Studies.

The discussions were initiated by the first speaker, **Prof. (Dr.) Lawrence Prabhakar**, who focused on human security in the age of climate-induced migration in the session. He referred to climate change as a global common of transnational interest, while mentioning that the impact of climate change has triggered social instability within the region, leading to the displacement of people and economic instability in different parts of the world. He pointed out that climate change is universal but the effects vary from one continent to another. The speaker further added that due to the basic rights of food, shelter and water being compromised, there is a growth in psychological impacts on humans forcing climate-induced migration. Dr. Prabhakar pointed out that because templates of climate change cannot be predicted, different parts of the world have opted for different methods to fight the same. He mentioned that the littorals of the Bay of Bengal will be flooded by rising sea levels and increased frequency of disasters such as tropical cyclones, where a massive crisis is expected in the coming years due to a crunch in the natural resources. The speaker further pointed out the vulnerabilities of the Bay of Bengal countries to climate change, where India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Indonesia come within the extreme risk category with their agro-based economies being highly vulnerable. In addition to this, Dr. Prabhakar mentioned that coastal erosion of the Bay of Bengal littoral states is also a major issue; India witnessed the erosion of 233 sq km of land, where institutional mechanisms such as SAARC were equipped with an inefficient disaster management centre. The speaker thus recommended capacity-building measures by the regional governments in this area and mentioned that frameworks such as the India-Bangladesh MOU on the conservation of Sundarbans, could be replicated. He stressed the need for BIMSTEC and the Bay of Bengal to have a climate action working group as a comprehensive framework to address migrations with an information agency to warn and foresee the disaster dangers within the region. He concluded by saying that there must be an aligning of national climate policies of nations with BIMSTEC climate agendas, as climate change-induced migration is going to be aggravated by sea level rise where the basic scope of these changes is going to be unpredictable in the coming years.

The second speaker of the session, **Mr. Mohammed Hoodh Ibrahim**, addressed the session

by analysing the topic of human security from the Maldivian point of view. He mentioned that in the Maldives there are environmental as well as geopolitical challenges, where the small island developing state is addressed as the pearl necklace of the Indian Ocean. The speaker mentioned that the human security of Maldives is the security of the Indian Ocean as well. Additionally, he mentioned that in the backdrop of the rising threat of climate change, Maldives had launched the Floating city project, a human habitat project for the future considering the vulnerability of Maldives to climate change. Mr. Ibrahim pointed out that Maldives is positioned as a toll gate in the Indian Ocean and 50% of India's external trade and 80% of imports transit through this region. The speaker mentioned that before the pandemic, Maldives which was extremely dependent on tourism was affected by food insecurity as the supply chain disruptions affected food imports. Therefore, resilient supply chains are necessary for the development of the state. In the field of agriculture, the private sector is getting involved in organic farming instead of fertiliser-based farming. The creativity and innovation of young people are helping to create new narratives in the farming sector. The power of storytelling through social media is also giving scope for popularisation and customer awareness in this sector. He stated that the future of the Maldives lies in strong partnerships and that they cannot exist in asylum. The speaker concluded by mentioning that regional friendships and partnerships are needed to tackle climate change.

Mr. Sanjay Gathia, the third speaker of the session focused on the human security concerns associated with the ongoing forced migration from Myanmar. He stated that there are at least 50,000 Burmese refugees in Tripura and other border areas of India. In Bangladesh, a million Rohingya refugees are said to be residing along with an estimated 22,000 Burmese refugees in Thailand. He also added that political insecurity clubbed with the imposition of martial law has affected the personal security of people in the region. For India, he says that the ongoing crisis in Myanmar will affect its Act East Policy. He also emphasised on the role of connectivity projects such as the Asian Highways and India Myanmar Thailand Highway for the region in the backdrop of sporadic military-to-military conflicts. Mr. Gathia concluded the session by stressing on the need for a comprehensive refugee policy, for India, to take a lead in the region to address similar challenges.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1. The region must look into building resilience in supply chains, promoting effective governance, and partnerships, especially alongside the region's youth.
2. The region must look to align national climate policies with BIMSTEC's climate agendas and inculcate a climate action working group and comprehensive information agency to monitor the region.
3. SAARC must look to be re-activated in terms of its disaster centres and resilience, and promote a holistically uniform approach to mitigate and manage disasters.



SESSION 6: EMERGING TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS AND INNOVATION IN THE BAY OF BENGAL

The sixth session was moderated by **Dr. D Dhanuraj, Chairman, CPPR**. The session was on emerging technological advancements in the Bay of Bengal. The speakers of the session were **Ms. Lamiyah Daraksha, Technical Project Manager at BRAC International; Mr. Abhijnan Rej, Founder & Chief Scientist of Tarqeq Research LLP and Mr. Tanis Phongphisantham, Researcher at Keron Technology, Technologist, Cyber Security Consultant at Ylg Bullion International Co., LTD**. The session focused on technological advancement and cooperation which can address various challenges in the Bay of Bengal Region.

The moderator for the session, Dr. D Dhanuraj, in his opening remarks stated that “technology is the buzzword in the market, globally regionally or in state matters.” While reflecting on his career, he mentioned that what is being discussed today couldn’t be discussed twenty years back. He further added that how institutions revolve around technological developments is a question that needs to be dealt with. Regarding sharing technologies, Dr. Dhanuraj stated that “some countries are advanced whereas others are learning, one of the things we are going to learn is a technological transfer”. He further added that technology requires new and evolving policies. He further highlighted the technological relationship in fisheries, marine litter and fishing practices. He introduced the three speakers of the session and invited them to share with the participants of the conference their perspectives on technology in the Bay of Bengal.

The first speaker of the session, **Ms. Lamiyah Daraksha**, highlighted the technological challenges in the Bay of Bengal region and emphasised the need for multilateral cooperation in the region. She stated that the Bay of Bengal, the largest bay in the world, ultimately makes it vulnerable to any sort of disaster. While talking about technology, Ms. Daraksha states that “when there was no technology, numerical data was helping make decisions and now when we have the technology, we need to take forward this powerhouse of data”. She further added that “the seas

do not divide us but unite us”. Highlighting the importance of data, Ms. Daraksha stated that “This understanding of ‘which data’ should be shared and which should not be shared should be reflected in policies and added that countries together need to sit in order for these policies to be implemented into a larger area”.

The second speaker of the session, **Mr. Abhijnan Rej**, touched upon the non-traditional security threats and usage of data to address the challenges in the region. Mr. Rej in his opening remarks mentioned that the problems that we encounter today are not new and that Cyclone Bhola did not occur because it did not have enough data. He further added that Bhola shows how important non-traditional security can be for geopolitical discussions. In regards to the transboundary issue, he stated that the feasible features that we are more likely to see are regional mechanisms. He stated that IUU can be tackled via coverage of the water area, alongside distributed imagery of the Bay of Bengal and that removing control of data from governments can help in controlling trafficking and illegal migration. In conclusion, Mr. Rej also stated that there is a need for the Bay of Bengal to bridge the technological gap through the development of technological connections and that there is a need to emphasise on transborder flows of technology and data.

The third speaker of the session, **Mr. Tanis Phongphisantham**, emphasised the need to understand the details and intricacies of the various technological aspects of maritime security and climate security within the Bay of Bengal. He further added that there is a conflict with differing skill sets and needs for technology in the region. Mr. Phongphisantham also mentioned that the pooling of technological resources to play to each other’s strengths would not only enhance international cooperation but aid in using technology to pinpoint the lack of a technological presence within the Bay of Bengal. The speaker further added that this would be beneficial in targeting fisheries, effective marine policing, IUU, narcotic trafficking and synthetic aperture radars in marine coastal environments. He further emphasised that the Western discourse on technological advancements needs to be balanced with the South Asian and Southeast Asian narratives. Mr. Phongphisantham elaborated on the significance of accessibility of technology as well - stating it to be a driving factor within the region. The speaker highlighted the steps taken by Thailand, mentioning that the nation looked to allow startups to interact and work with space technology to address space interplanetary issues. This led to the formation of satellite formations, payloads, developments in space technology and launchers within the nation’s space technology domain. He further added that Southeast Asian and South Asian governments need to have policies that allow technology to emerge, as there is a need for frameworks aiming to prioritise regional grids and regional cooperation. The speaker also mentioned the importance of using data to map out resource extraction, energy production, and farming. Mr. Phongphisantham touched upon the common element of data acting as a tinder for firing up the age of new technological development and mechanisms that target policies and regulatory mechanisms pertaining to the Bay of Bengal. He further added that the region lacks data for creating an overview of activities in the Bay of Bengal in measuring water quality and fisheries. Mr. Phongphisantham concluded the session by mentioning that fostering an environment of collaboration within startups is essential to not only share knowledge and technologies but become an ecosystem where accessibility is easier and data is efficient.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1. Nations must collaborate to inculcate policies that include the regional transfer flow of data in the region.

2. Nations within the region must be able to utilise shared technology to deal with non-traditional and traditional security threats.
3. Fostering an environment of collaboration within startups in the region is essential to promote an ecosystem where accessibility is easier alongside increasing the efficiency of data.

PLENARY SESSION: BAY OF BENGAL AS A PIVOT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA

The final session of the conference was the plenary session comprising of three speakers namely **Vice Admiral M P Muralidharan (Retd), ASVM & Bar, NM, Distinguished Fellow, CPPR and Adm Jayanath Colombage (Retd), Director General, Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka (INSSSL), and Mr. Nahian Sabriet Raza, Research Officer at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS).**



The first speaker, **Vice Adm. M P Muralidharan (Retd)**, kickstarted the session by addressing how the countries in South Asia can build up the Bay of Bengal for their collective interests. He mentioned the need to take things forward and look at the non-traditional sectors of maritime security with increased significance. He proceeded to mention the requirement to cooperate in areas where the region can foster collaboration and cooperation. He also highlighted the need for BIMSTEC to look at the big picture via collaborative efforts.

The second speaker, **Adm. Jayanath Colombage**, described the Bay of Bengal in eight words: Strategic competition, strategic convergence, strategic dilemma, and strategic ambiguity. He stated that the enhanced competition within the maritime space has given rise to regional dilemmas and ambiguities that have established a new stage in history. The speaker highlighted the significance of maritime and regional strategy when it came to the Bay of Bengal, emphasising the region as a connector between the Indo-Pacific and the Indian Ocean, alongside bordering ASEAN. Admiral Colombage also mentioned the need to foster peace within the region. the speaker also mentioned that threats by non-state actors and non-traditional threats to maritime security

in piracy, narcotics trade, human trafficking, IUU fishing may hasten the decline of fish and the fisheries sector in the region. He proceeded to mention that the region must look to move beyond cooperation and foster collaboration, while synergizing strategic issues in the Bay of Bengal. The speaker further added that it is time to reintegrate our integrated region, where culture, trade, and history has dominated the region through water and land. Admiral Colombage proceeded to mention that the region views ASEAN through the lens of BIMSTEC. He concluded by mentioning that political leadership and governance at the top level need to take responsibility when it comes to the maritime domain, where a robust regional outlook on policy making is required to synergize regional collaborative efforts.

The third speaker, **Mr. Nahian Sabriet Raza**, mentioned that the transnational powers are yet to harness the opportunities within the Bay of Bengal, which is essential as there are immense possibilities for connectivity in the region. He mentioned that non-security threats have been an aspect of great importance within the maritime security narrative as these threats may seem ambiguous in nature, yet are increasingly difficult to deal with as a region and require collaborative efforts. Thus, Mr. Sabriet mentioned that the region should look to the sharing of resources, where he once again stressed regional cooperation. The speaker also mentioned the need for the region to look outside BIMSTEC areas of cooperation, and target areas of maritime security threats, science and technology, energy cooperation, transport and infrastructure alongside space technology. Mr. Sabriet concluded the session by mentioning that it is time to formulate regional policy frameworks that look to focus on significant target areas of IUU fishing and piracy.

The two-day conference came to a close emphasising the importance of regional collaboration and cooperation for shared prosperity and growth. The dialogues and deliberations gave fresh insights into tackling Non-Traditional Security challenges of the region, highlighting the need for change in policy making at the national, subnational as well as regional levels.





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