



RIS
Research and Information System
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विकासशील देशों की अनुसंधान एवं सूचना प्रणाली



INNOVATION LAB FOR
**FOOD SECURITY POLICY RESEARCH,
CAPACITY, AND INFLUENCE (PRCI)**



**MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY**

BIMSTEC Synergies in Agricultural Trade: Promoting Regional Growth

25 June 2024 | New Delhi

Outcome Report



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Zone IV B, 4th Floor, India Habitat Centre
Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110 003, India
Tel.: +91-11-24682177-80; Fax: +91-11-24682173-74
E-mail: aic@ris.org.in; dgoffice@ris.org.in
Website: www.ris.org.in

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PREFACE

Professor Sachin Chaturvedi

Director General, RIS

As BIMSTEC faces unprecedented challenges in food security, climate change, and economic disparities, it has become imperative for our member states to explore innovative solutions that leverage our shared resources, expertise and untapped synergies. In this context, the conference on '*BIMSTEC Synergies in Agricultural Trade: Promoting Regional Growth*' represents a significant milestone in our collective efforts to harness the power of collaboration for sustainable development in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) region.

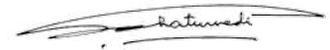
The region comprises nearly 22 per cent of the global population with a gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$3.6 trillion. With the accelerated pace of nutrition transition in our member states and as a principal source of employment in the BIMSTEC region, the sectoral significance of agriculture is expected to increase manifold. In this context, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's clarion call to initiate deliberations on the development of regional value chains in the agriculture sector in BIMSTEC highlights the untapped potentialities that underlie the region in the area of value addition and food processing. Thus, by building on the comparative advantages of our member states, the region can play a pivotal role in harnessing complementarities and promoting a deeper level of cooperation in the agriculture sector.

To achieve the same, convergence of stakeholders in areas such as technology and trade policy is of paramount importance. This would entail designing an agenda that focuses on eliminating persistent bottlenecks in the region's agriculture policy by propagating harmonization in areas such as tariff and non-tariff barriers like food standards and certifications, made robust by capacity building and scaling up requisite technology capabilities that can help revolutionize agriculture trade in BIMSTEC. The modalities underlying these policies will be fundamental in unravelling the synergies in region and paving the way for the BIMSTEC as a growth hub for the agrarian sector.

Given this broader context and to deliberate on the various dimensions of an 'agriculture trade-led growth' in BIMSTEC, RIS organized a one-day conference on the theme of '*BIMSTEC Synergies in Agricultural Trade: Promoting Regional Growth*' in New Delhi on 25 June 2024. The programme was held in collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Michigan State University (MSU) and The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy Research, Capacity, and Influence (PRCI) with the participation of diplomats, scholars, practitioners and industry experts from various BIMSTEC countries. The conference

emphasized several key themes and provoked stimulating discussions on diverse policy issues such as protectionism in the agriculture sector, the scope of fostering agriculture value chains regionally, and the benefits of capacity building and knowledge sharing among member states. These themes are interwoven with the broader goals of BIMSTEC to promote regional integration, economic cooperation, and sustainable development. By dovetailing regional efforts towards these focus areas, BIMSTEC will spearhead a vision toward a prosperous and inclusive future.

This publication presents the major issues discussed and the key takeaways from the aforesaid conference. I am sure it would be found interesting and useful for scholars, practitioners and development agencies with a stake in the region's developmental trajectory. I take this opportunity to thank my colleagues at the IFPRI, MSU, PRCI and Professor S. K. Mohanty and Dr Pankhuri Gaur, Assistant Professor, RIS for the immense success of the conference. Thanks are also due to all the distinguished delegates and participants who graced the conference and enriched the discussion with their valuable insights, and also RIS Publication team for designing of the Report.



Sachin Chaturvedi

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This outcome document of the conference on '*BIMSTEC Synergies in Agricultural Trade: Promoting Regional Growth*' has been prepared under the overall guidance of Professor Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General, RIS with the team comprising Professor S.K. Mohanty, Dr Pankhuri Gaur, Ms Amanat Singh, Ms Divyanjana and Mr Ayush Tiwari, RIS.

We gratefully acknowledge the support extended by The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy Research, Capacity, and Influence (PRCI), Michigan State University (MSU) and International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), for organising the conference. We would also like to acknowledge, in particular, the support rendered by Dr Suresh Babu, Senior Research Fellow and Head for Capacity Strengthening, IFPRI; Professor David Tschirley, MSU; and Ms Nandita Srivastava, Research Analyst, IFPRI for developing the conference agenda. Special thanks to our PRCI partner institutions for their active participation in the conference.

We would also like to express our deepest gratitude to Mr Indra Mani Pandey, Secretary General, BIMSTEC for sharing his valuable observations in the conference. Our heartfelt thanks to H.E. Mr Md. Mustafizur Rahman, High Commissioner, High Commission for the People's Republic of Bangladesh; H.E. Dr Shankar Prasad Sharma, Ambassador, Embassy of Nepal; Mr Thirapath Mongkolnavin, Minister and Deputy Chief of Mission, Royal Thai Embassy; Ms Wathsala Amarasinghe, Minister Counsellor, High Commissioner for the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka for their esteemed presence and enriching our discussion of the BIMSTEC agriculture sector.

Our deepest gratitude to Mr C S R Ram, Joint Secretary, BIMSTEC and SAARC, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India for delivering a thought-provoking valedictory address. We would also like to thank Ms Naureen Ahsan, Additional Foreign Secretary (Research), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh for participating in the conference and sharing her insights in the conference.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the participants who made it convenient to join us at the conference as chairpersons, speakers, presenters, sponsors and audience alike. Thanks are also due to RIS research, administrative and support staff for their help during the conference and for preparation of this report. We also note with appreciation the support received from the publication team at RIS comprising Mr Tish Malhotra, Dr Ivy Roy Sarkar, Mr Sachin Singhal and Mr Sanjeev Karna for arranging the production of this Report.

The report carries the personal views expressed by the participants at the conference. They are not necessarily those of the Governments of the respective BIMSTEC member states. Usual disclaimers apply.

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

- RIS, in collaboration with The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy Research, Capacity, and Influence (PRCI), Michigan State University and IFPRI organised a one-day Regional Conference on “BIMSTEC Synergies in Agricultural Trade: Promoting Regional Growth” on 25 June 2024 in New Delhi. Over 30 speakers comprising diplomats, scholars, practitioners and industry experts from the BIMSTEC region participated and shared their insights on the agriculture sector in the region and Member States. The conference focused on issues relating to agricultural trade in the BIMSTEC region in four broad areas that included the state of agriculture in BIMSTEC, challenges faced through trade barriers, trends in processed and non-processed food trade and regional agri-value chains in the region.
- The **Inaugural Session** of the Conference commenced with the Welcome Remarks of Professor Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General, RIS in which he outlined the objectives of the Conference and underlined the key areas of untapped opportunities in BIMSTEC’s regional agricultural trade. The Inaugural Remarks were extended by Dr Shahidur Rashid, Director, South Asia Office, IFPRI. He highlighted the prospects presented by the paradigmatic shift in conventional agricultural trade with increasing fragmentation in the form of value chains globally as well as in BIMSTEC. The inaugural address was delivered by Mr Indra Mani Pandey, Secretary General, BIMSTEC. He stressed on the civilisational and historical linkages among BIMSTEC nations that have guided the adoption of important regional cooperation mechanisms such as the Plan of Action on Strengthening BIMSTEC Agricultural Cooperation (2023-2027) in the past. He also emphasised the importance of reducing agricultural trade barriers in BIMSTEC, thereby boosting intra-regional trade and food security in the region. Professor S. K. Mohanty, RIS discussed the format of the conference and the motivation behind the upcoming sessions.
- The session on **State of Agriculture in the BIMSTEC Region: Opportunities for Growth** gave critical insights into the agricultural landscape, challenges, transformations, and policy imperatives that underlie the growth trajectory of the region. The agricultural sector in the BIMSTEC region is on the cusp of pathbreaking transformation with the evolution of traditional agrarian models of subsistence farming to commercially viable agri-business models. This paradigmatic shift is crucial for advancing economic growth in BIMSTEC nations, necessitating robust investments in research and development (R&D) and agri

start-ups to enhance climate resilience and develop new crop varieties. Addressing fundamental challenges like insufficient credit access and incubation support is crucial to fostering a conducive environment for agricultural entrepreneurship in the BIMSTEC region. Furthermore, green technologies, including agri-photovoltaics, present significant market opportunities within the BIMSTEC region for fostering sustainable agricultural practices and economic growth. However, each Member State requires tailored solutions due to the unique economic circumstances and geographical constraints that underpin their economies. The role of markets, institutional and political factors underscore the intricate dynamics influencing agricultural transformation and regional trade linkages. Agriculture trade in the BIMSTEC region plays a significant role despite its relatively modest scale. However, the agriculture sector presents a highly protected sector within the region. Notably, there is a burgeoning trade surplus specifically in processed food compared to non-processed food. Structural transformation within BIMSTEC, particularly in food processing, presents immense opportunities for economic diversification and enhanced agricultural value chain integration. The region is transitioning from the initial phase of production unbundling to the second phase, focusing on the trade of intermediate products. As a result, certain countries show potential as hubs for production and trade in specific product categories, indicating a trend towards growing product sophistication. Thus, the BIMSTEC region stands at a crucial juncture in its agricultural development trajectory, characterised by evolving challenges and transformative opportunities.

- In the session on **Protectionism in Agriculture and Rise of Sectoral Trade**, the experts deliberated on a variety of tariff and non-tariff barriers that persistently inhibit the agricultural trade flows among the BIMSTEC countries. The session highlighted the untapped potential for agriculture trade within the BIMSTEC, driven by comparative advantages in agricultural production such as abundant land, labour, and the gradual adoption of modern technologies for commercialisation. Despite this potential, the actual realisation of intra-BIMSTEC trade remains low, which currently hovers around 6 per cent, in contrast to ASEAN (26 per cent), highlighting the untapped synergies in the regional integration of BIMSTEC. Interestingly, in BIMSTEC, non-agricultural trade encounters fewer barriers compared to agricultural trade. These barriers often include temporary export bans, and anti-dumping duties alongside a wide range of SPS measures. Notwithstanding these challenges, there is a noticeable increase in trade in specific agricultural sub-sectors within the BIMSTEC region. These include fish, crustaceans, cereal preparations, beverages, prepared foods, fruits & vegetables and animal fodder, among others. Informal trade in agricultural products is another important area of analysis in BIMSTEC. Most of the informally traded agricultural products in BIMSTEC are those that are highly protected and suffer from rampant price distortions in the region. Given these developments, trade facilitation will be crucial in guiding the trajectory of agricultural trade flows in BIMSTEC. To ensure seamless trade facilitation in the region, the establishment of a single window for trade and customs procedures, signing of Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) among BIMSTEC members' regional certification authorities, formalisation of e-SPS certifications

and establishment of cross-border payment mechanisms aided by digitisation of trade contracts & orders through e-signatures, e-contracts, and e-payments will be pivotal in fostering seamless agricultural trade flows and addressing the disparities observed in sectoral trade dynamics within the region.

- Discussion in the session on **Rise of Processed & Non-Processed Foods in the Regional Trade** focused on the export potential, challenges and opportunities in the processed food sector in BIMSTEC for the expansion of trade in processed food. Trade of processed and non-processed products is increasing steadily in the region. In recent years, the processed food sector has been identified as a key industry in BIMSTEC countries, acknowledging the high profitability of the sector. Opportunities in the sector arise due to increasing domestic and export demand; technological improvements and policies; and emergence of global value chains. However, primary commodities still dominate the agriculture trade basket of most BIMSTEC countries. The share of processed exports has declined over the years in the region, whereas the share of semi-processed exports has increased. In the case of Nepal, the total share of processed food in the total food trade is high, with the export share being 88 per cent and the import share being 44 per cent for processed food in 2021-22. Instance of under-trading has been identified in BIMSTEC members' trade participation due to many factors including import restrictions, tariff escalation, underdeveloped infrastructure, and limited trade facilitation measures. A proper definition of processed food is the need of the hour. Trade liberalisation through orthodox opening, improved trade facilitation, and investment in critical infrastructure such as ports, railroads, roads, and information technology would help to streamline trade, reduce costs, and stimulate economic growth, which in turn would unlock the full potential of the region. To fully leverage the benefits of trade, policies and planning must also be geared towards mainstreaming trade in differentiated products and participation in GVC.
- The session on **Prospects of Agriculture Value Chains in BIMSTEC** highlighted the key role agricultural value chains play in the region, being one of the major drivers of trade and economic growth. Product-specific value chains were also discussed in detail with a special focus on cassava, fish, and dairy value chains. The general trend in BIMSTEC shows importing more high-value products while exporting unprocessed products. There has been a continuing dominance of upstream in the regional trade, while the quantum of downstream trade is rising but volatile. In the BIMSTEC agri-value chain trade with the world, there is a huge trade surplus in nominally processed products; however, the semi-processed segment suffers a huge deficit. In the region, Thailand has been successful in integrating into global markets and participating in agriculture GVCs. The national policies adopted in Thailand have been relevant to its agriculture sector. Thailand prioritises Bio-, Circular-, Green- (BCG) economy model to strengthen the competitive advantage of the country using Science Technology and Innovation (STI), and encourages setting up of future industry as a way to explore value-added agriculture for economic development, boosted by public and private investments in R&D. India's value chain

participation is more global than regional, with higher backward GVC participation. India is the largest producer of dairy contributing more than 24 per cent of the global share, with dairy contributing 5 per cent to the national economy. Intra-regional trade in fish in the BIMSTEC region is characterised by high exports of deep-processed fish, indicating dominance downstream value chain segment, with India and Sri Lanka as distinct exporters. India is the largest fish producer in BIMSTEC and 2nd largest in the world, followed by Bangladesh in the region. The presence of high protection in the agriculture sector is impeding regional value chains in agriculture trade. There is a need to liberalise midstream and downstream sectors to increase intra-regional trade. Further steps can also be taken to strengthen regional value chains in agriculture, such as integration of advanced technology, digital interventions, harmonising quality standards, and capitalising marine transport for cost and energy efficiency.

- The **Valedictory Session** outlined key aspects and the way forward for strengthening agricultural trade in BIMSTEC. It emphasised how different institutions have come together for this project on BIMSTEC agriculture, with RIS organising three major capacity-building programmes and regional conferences. The main challenge in the region is to attract the youth back to the farms. Bio-economy was the new dimension that was discussed in the conference. Other issues which came up for intense discussion were trade restrictions, trade policies, governance, sectoral, and capacity issues. Various eminent speakers put forward their views on these topics. H.E. Mr Md. Mustafizur Rahman, High Commissioner for the People's Republic of Bangladesh, highlighted the inherent strength possessed by the region to develop agriculture with export potential, and the role of intra-regional trade for sustaining current development, economic integration, and cooperation among member countries. H.E. Dr Shankar Prasad Sharma, Ambassador, Embassy of Nepal, underscored the potential for growth in BIMSTEC and brought out key areas for regional cooperation such as connectivity through hydroelectricity, roads, railways, petroleum pipelines; technology including seed technology and irrigation, among others; and exchange of experts and training between BIMSTEC countries. Mr Thirapath Mongkolnavin, Minister and Deputy Chief of Mission, Royal Thai Embassy, highlighted Thailand's innovative role in the food systems and mentioned that it remains committed to increasing regional cooperation through Bangkok Vision 2030, aimed at achieving a 'Prosperous, Resilient and Open BIMSTEC by 2030. Mr CSR Ram, Joint Secretary, BIMSTEC and SAARC, emphasized on the importance of a Regional Data Bank for pooling the databases of the region, and the setting up of new institutions like BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence for Agriculture, with a vision for institution building and capacity building. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks from the organisers.
- The Conference was attended by over than 140 participants and was well received by all those present. The participants thanked RIS for hosting the regional conference and gratefully acknowledged the support extended by PRCI, MSU and IFPRI for organising this conference and such similar events in the past on BIMSTEC agriculture sector in the form of capacity building programmes and international conferences.

AGENDA

0830 – 0900 HRS	Registration
0900 – 0930 HRS	Inaugural Session
	<p><i>Welcome Remarks: Professor Sachin Chaturvedi</i>, Director General, RIS</p> <p><i>Inaugural Remarks: Dr Shahidur Rashid</i>, Director, South Asia Office, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)</p> <p><i>Inaugural Address: H.E. Indra Mani Pandey</i>, Secretary General, BIMSTEC (Video Message)</p> <p><i>Vote of Thanks: Professor S.K. Mohanty</i>, RIS</p>
0930 – 1000 HRS	Tea Break and Group Photo
1000 – 1130 HRS	Session 1: State of Agriculture in the BIMSTEC Region: Opportunities for Growth
	<p><i>Chair: Dr Smita Sirohi</i>, Principal Scientist, ICAR, India</p> <p><i>Speakers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Kalpana Sastry, Managing Director, AgHub Foundation, India • Dr Biswash Gauchan, Executive Director, Institute for Integrated Development Studies, Nepal • Dr Devesh Roy, Senior Research Fellow, IFPRI • Dr Manoj Thibbotuwawa, Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies, Sri Lanka • Professor S. K. Mohanty, RIS, India <p><i>Open Discussion</i></p>
1130 – 1145 HRS	Tea Break
1145 – 1315 HRS	Session 2: Protectionism in Agriculture & Rise of Sectoral Trade
	<p><i>Chair: Dr Suresh Babu</i>, Senior Research Fellow and Head of Capacity Strengthening, IFPRI</p> <p><i>Speakers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Mahfuz Kabir, Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Bangladesh • Mr Abhinav Shukla, Regional Head – North India, Agri Business Division, ITC Limited, India • Mr Abul Kamar, Senior Research Analyst, South Asia Office, IFPRI • Professor Prabir De, RIS, India <p><i>Open Discussion</i></p>
1315 – 1430 HRS	Lunch Break

1430 – 1600 HRS	Session 3: Rise of Processed & Non-Processed Foods in the Regional Trade
	<p><i>Chair:</i> Dr P K Anand, Visiting Fellow, RIS, India</p> <p><i>Speakers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Devesh Roy, Senior Research Fellow, IFPRI • Dr Mirza Mofazzal Islam, Former Director General, Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture, Bangladesh • Professor Jeevika Weerahewa, Senior Professor, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka • Dr Devendra Gauchan, Adjunct Professor, IAAS, Tribhuvan University, Nepal • Mr Aleen Mukherjee, Agri Business Consultant, India <p><i>Open Discussion</i></p>
1600 – 1615 HRS	Tea Break
1615 – 1745 HRS	Session 4: Prospects of Agriculture Value Chains in BIMSTEC
	<p><i>Chair:</i> Ms Naureen Ahsan, Additional Foreign Secretary (Research), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh</p> <p><i>Speakers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Orachos Napasintuwong, Faculty of Economics, Kasetsart University, Thailand • Dr Arun Padiyar Panemangalore, Lead, World Fish, India • Dr Anil K Dixit, Principal Scientist, ICAR-National Dairy Research Institute, India • Dr Sendhil R., Associate Professor, Pondicherry University, India • Dr Pankhuri Gaur, Assistant Professor, RIS, India <p><i>Open Discussion</i></p>
1745 – 1815 HRS	Valedictory Session
	<p><i>Closing Remarks:</i> Professor Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General, RIS</p> <p><i>Closing Remarks:</i> Dr Suresh Babu, Senior Research Fellow and Head of Capacity Strengthening, IFPRI</p> <p><i>Special Addresses:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Mr Md. Mustafizur Rahman, High Commissioner, High Commission for the People's Republic of Bangladesh • H.E. Dr Shankar Prasad Sharma, Ambassador, Embassy of Nepal • Ms Wathsala Amarasinghe, Minister Counsellor, High Commissioner for the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka • Mr. Thirapath Mongkolnavin, Minister and Deputy Chief of Mission, Royal Thai Embassy <p><i>Valedictory Address:</i> Mr C S R Ram, Joint Secretary, BIMSTEC and SAARC, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India</p> <p><i>Vote of Thanks:</i> Professor S. K. Mohanty, RIS, India</p>
1830HRS Onwards	Dinner

CONCEPT NOTE

BIMSTEC has emerged as one of the fastest-growing economic regions globally, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reaching USD 4.55 trillion in 2022. Despite challenges such as the global recession and the COVID-19 pandemic, the region demonstrated robust growth rates, expanding at 7.3 per cent during periods of global buoyancy and 6.2 per cent during recessions before COVID-19, and achieving 6.8 per cent growth in the post-recovery period until 2022. The region's overall trade reached USD 2.56 trillion, with agricultural trade accounting for USD 151.45 billion in 2021. In many BIMSTEC countries, agriculture contributes more to GDP than manufacturing, playing a vital role in ensuring food and livelihood security. Agriculture is the principal employment source, making it crucial for economic development and sustainability. Recognising its importance, BIMSTEC has prioritised "Agriculture and Food Security" as a core area of cooperation, adopting strategies to strengthen this sector. However, enhancing agricultural growth to meet present and future food demands is complex due to many challenges like inefficient input use, poor technologies, lack of market integration, stagnating crop yields, declining profitability, and the deteriorating value of food production. Addressing these challenges is essential for sustainable agricultural development and economic resilience in the region.

The region has witnessed considerable agricultural development, contributing significantly to the rising prosperity and improved quality of life in the region. Despite the growth in the middle and upper-income populations, poverty remains a concern. Agricultural advancements are evident in both production and trade, with a growing demand for processed and non-processed food to cater to various societal segments. Intra-regional trade, particularly in agriculture, has observed substantial growth, especially in high-value and technology-intensive sectors. The region has also made significant strides in reducing trade protection within the agriculture sector, enhancing its global competitiveness and maintaining a trade surplus over the last two decades. Farm mechanisation has expanded in diverse agricultural and allied sectors, including dairy and fishery. There is a gradual shift from subsistence to commercial agriculture, though this transition varies across regional economies. In this context development of Regional Value Chains is notable in sectors like fish, meat, and tea. The proposed BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement is also expected to further liberalise the agricultural sector, boosting competitiveness, both, within the region and globally. In this backdrop, the regional conference on "BIMSTEC Synergies in Agricultural Trade: Promoting Regional Growth" would aim to focus on four agricultural issues in four different sessions discussed in detail below:

Session I: State of Agriculture in BIMSTEC

The BIMSTEC region is characterised by diverse climate zones and ecosystems, including high-altitude mountains, water bodies, tropical forests, and mangroves, leading to varying levels of vulnerability to climate risks. Factors such as recurrent natural disasters, high population density, and poverty further compound this vulnerability. The IPCC report of 2022 predicts significant water scarcity along the Ganges and Indus rivers, along with severe food shortages, highlighting the critical impact of climate change on agriculture in the region. Each BIMSTEC country faces specific climate-related challenges: Bhutan is prone to severe and frequent monsoonal storms, landslides, and flooding; Nepal experiences temperature variations, floods, heat waves, and glacial lake outbursts; Bangladesh is affected by storm surges, sea level rise, floods, and drought; Sri Lanka deals with flash floods, cyclones, dryness, droughts, and extreme rainfall; India faces rising temperatures and increased precipitation; and Thailand encounters rising temperatures, floods, and monsoonal storms. Addressing these diverse and severe climate impacts is crucial for the region's agricultural resilience and food security.

Despite several difficulties, the agricultural industry continues to play a vital role in ensuring food security and employment in the majority of BIMSTEC countries. A significant share of the labour market is engaged in agriculture-related activities, primarily in cropping, with increasing participation in non-crop sub-sectors such as livestock, poultry, and fisheries. The share of the allied sector in agricultural GDP has been rising rapidly. There are significant differences in crop yield per hectare among BIMSTEC countries, presenting opportunities for cross-country learning and cooperation in various domains such as agricultural production practices, soil conservation, output quality, waste reduction, input and seed quality, product diversification, marketing, technology integration, supply-chain management, and best practices.

From the perspective of food security, agriculture continues to have significant relevance, as seen by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent surges in global food prices. These developments have underscored the need for renewed attention to food availability, access, utilisation, and stability to maintain food security. Addressing these challenges and opportunities is crucial for the region's agricultural resilience and overall economic stability.

Session II: Protectionism in BIMSTEC and Rise in Sectoral Trade

Protectionism in agriculture is a significant issue within the BIMSTEC region, which consists of a mix of developing and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) that are generally more protected compared to several emerging economies. The free flow of goods within the region is impeded by high tariffs and non-tariff barriers. To address these challenges, BIMSTEC has tried to handle them through a dual approach consisting of the BIMSTEC FTA and a trade facilitation initiative. Despite these efforts, tariff protection for agricultural products remains

considerably higher than that for non-agricultural products in all member states. Tariff asymmetries are substantive among the regional economies, with the agriculture sector being the most protected due to concerns over food and livelihood security. The region has seen variations in agricultural tariff liberalisation during different economic cycles, with a notable reduction during the period of global economic buoyancy but has witnessed the reversal of it during the period of recession. However, effective trade facilitation measures, such as streamlined customs procedures and improved infrastructure, are still lacking, which hinders the reduction of trade costs and the efficiency of cross-border trade. The importance of RTAs in creating trade impacts in the agricultural sector is evident, as seen in the cases of AFTA, COMESA, and MERCOSUR, which have significantly reduced protectionist measures and increased trade in agricultural products among their member countries. However, trade costs including transport and logistics continue to play a crucial role in determining agricultural trade flows within RTAs.

Tariff-related issues in agriculture markets are multifaceted and have a substantial impact on developing economies. Tariff escalation in processed foods, where tariffs on processed products exceed those on raw materials, prohibits diversification and is particularly detrimental as most value-addition occurs at the latter stages of production. This escalation is most evident in the schedules of Eastern Europe, the Middle East, North America, the EU, and countries in BIMSTEC and South Asia. While some processing chains see stable or even declining tariffs with additional processing, tariff peaks in the agriculture sector are most common in major food staples, fruits and vegetables, and processed food products. However, agricultural tariffs above 100 per cent are relatively less in number in the region.

The dominance of non-ad valorem tariffs has added complexity to the agricultural tariff structure, with an increase in tariff lines to accommodate seasonal, in-quota, and above-quota tariffs. These tariffs are less transparent, complicating the comparison of trade restrictiveness across countries and products, and creating uncertainties for exporters. They often vary according to technical reasons, such as sugar or alcohol content, further reducing transparency. Non-ad valorem tariffs disproportionately affect lower-priced imports, disadvantaging developing country exporters. This non-transparent tariff structure poses significant barriers to regional trade liberalisation in the processed food sector and hinders the development of agricultural value chains in diverse product segments within the region.

Session III: Processed and Non-Processed Food Trade in BIMSTEC

The BIMSTEC region is witnessing a rapid increase in intra-regional trade in the agricultural sector, reflecting a diverse demand for food driven by the region's economic structure. Low-income populations primarily demand non-processed staples, while middle and upper-income groups, concentrated in urban metropolises, favour processed foods. Urban

households in middle-income groups spend more on processed foods and eat out more frequently than rural households, with significant variations among different urban areas. Large metropolitan households consume more processed foods than those in smaller non-metropolitan regions, indicating that urbanisation impacts food consumption beyond socio-economic and demographic factors. This trend is evident in the growing demand for frozen and ready-to-cook foods among city dwellers, driven by busy lifestyles, smaller families, and working parents seeking convenience.

Globally, income growth, urbanisation, and demographic changes have shifted dietary habits from traditional cereals to meat, fish, dairy products, fast foods, and processed foods, marking a nutrition transition in middle-income countries. Over the past two decades, countries in the BIMSTEC region have seen increased disposable incomes leading to a dietary shift towards high sugar, fat, salt, and processed foods from traditional high-fibre, high-carbohydrate, and low-fat diets. The nature of food demand in BIMSTEC economies is thus shaped by the composition of the rural-urban population and their concentration in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, influencing the demand for both processed and non-processed foods.

This shift is driven by rising incomes, urbanisation, and greater participation of women in the workforce. As a result, a nutrition transition is underway, making processed food a vital component of the region's food trade sector. The region, which maintains a large trade surplus with the world, sees both exports and imports of processed and non-processed food. Food trade constituted a major part of exports and imports in the agricultural sector. Despite periodic endogenous and exogenous shocks, the import demand for both processed and non-processed food grew by more than 9 per cent each in the last two decades. Exports of processed and non-processed foods were nearly equal and both sectors demonstrated robust growth over the period. However, the trade surplus for non-processed food narrowed in recent years, whereas the surplus for processed food widened due to faster export growth. Empirical evidence suggests positive growth rates for both exports and imports, regardless of global trade policy changes. The region's high intra-industry trade in processed foods indicates a strong engagement in the simultaneous export and import of similar products, driven by rising per capita income and consumer preferences for diverse product varieties. This trend suggests that the food sector in the BIMSTEC region is poised for continued growth in the medium term.

Session IV: Prospects of Agricultural Value Chains in BIMSTEC

The trade dynamics in the agriculture and agro-food sector have undergone significant evolution, marked by distinct phases of development. Initially, the separation of production and consumption locations led to increased trade in final products. This has been

followed by the product-fragmentation phase across countries, resulting in a rise in trade in intermediates along with the final products. The region, in particular, has embraced agricultural value chain practices, with countries specialising in specific segments and exporting semi-processed products for further processing. Early agricultural value chains were dominated by commodity trading, supported by the development of standards and grades that facilitated the bulk mixing of products from different origins. The 2nd phase emphasised de-commodification and the importance of production methods, bolstered by contracting and marketing arrangements that fostered trust among value chain participants. This phase saw the integration of agro-food chains with marketing channels and an increased significance of upstream and downstream services, driven by innovations and improvements in trade logistics. Trends in Global Value Chain (GVC) participation indicate growing international linkages in agro-food sectors, particularly in emerging and developing countries, including those in Asia. These countries have increased their involvement in agro-food GVCs, trading more extensively among themselves and integrating their agro-food sectors. The BIMSTEC region followed these trends, with member countries increasingly engaged in the processed food trade as well as non-processed food trade. Large emerging countries such as China, Brazil, Thailand, and India have excelled in creating backward and forward linkages in the agro-GVC trade.

The complexity of agro-food GVCs has also increased, with sectors sourcing from a broader range of suppliers to support production. Despite periodic supply chain disruptions, such as those during the COVID-19 pandemic, the region's substantial production base, processing capabilities, and vast market size position it to become a major hub in the global agricultural GVC. The proposed FTA within the BIMSTEC region is expected to further bolster this growth, fostering increased IRT among member countries and supporting the surge of agricultural GVCs.

Over the past two decades, the region has witnessed significant growth, leading to the graduation of regional LDCs towards middle-income status, with Bhutan and Bangladesh already achieving this milestone. As mentioned earlier, this economic growth has resulted in a rise in average real income, prompting a noticeable shift in dietary habits towards protein-rich and processed foods. The demand for agricultural raw materials has surged, driven by the expansion of agro-based industries such as textiles, clothing, tea, coffee, edible preparations, wood products, pulp, and herbal medicine ingredients. This persistent growth in both food and non-food manufacturing industries highlights the region's eagerness to participate in agricultural value chains and processed food trade. The expansion of trade in non-processed products, both within and outside the region, highlights this interest. Furthermore, regional trade in the agricultural sector holds the potential to address various outstanding issues through increased collaboration and integration in agricultural value chains.

About the Conference and Participation

RIS has been actively engaged with the PRCI and its associated institutions, MSU and the IFPRI, through which we have focused on academic collaboration, capacity-building programmes, and disseminating research ideas. This programme has evolved into a platform for collaborative research and participatory training, particularly for senior researchers and PhD scholars specialising in agricultural trade within the BIMSTEC region.

Through this collaboration, we have published two studies on BIMSTEC regional trade in agriculture, conducted three capacity-building programmes, and organised three conferences. These capacity-building programmes have attracted scholars from BIMSTEC partner institutions and Indian universities. Our conferences have featured participation from subject experts, policymakers, diplomats, international organisations, the private sector, civil societies, and the BIMSTEC secretariat, along with representatives from PRCI and IFPRI. In this series, the present conference would attempt to take forward the agenda of synergies in agriculture trade and promoting regional growth of the region.

PROFILE OF SPEAKERS

(Speakers in Session-wise Order)



Professor Sachin Chaturvedi

Director General, RIS

Professor Sachin Chaturvedi is currently Director General at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), a New Delhi-based Think-Tank. He works on issues related to development economics, involving development finance, SDGs and South-South Cooperation, apart from trade, investment and innovation linkages with special focus on WTO. He has persistently endeavoured to build up institutions and launching of networks, both at national and international levels. He is credited with the launch of Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST) and Forum for Indian Development Cooperation (FIDC). He has also created “Delhi Process”, a major forum for exchange of ideas on South-South and triangular Cooperation. Professor Sachin Chaturvedi has been part of several important initiatives of the Government of India and takes keen interest in transforming economic policymaking towards integrated and evidence based approaches. He is one of the foremost commentators on India’s external sector economic engagements and partnerships. He has mentored several bright scholars and researchers in the profession. He has authored/edited more than 22 books, apart from contributing several chapters in the edited volumes and also publishing several research articles in prestigious journals. He is on the Editorial Board of several journals including the South Asian Economic Journal, IDS Bulletin, Sussex, UK among others. His book “The Logic of Sharing - Indian Approach to South-South Cooperation” has been acclaimed internationally as one of the best volumes on international development cooperation. Professor Sachin Chaturvedi was also the ‘Global Justice Fellow’ at the MacMillan Center for International Affairs at Yale University (2009-2010) and has served as a Visiting Professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and was a Developing Country Fellow at the University of Amsterdam (1996), Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla (2003), and Visiting Scholar at the German Development Institute (2007). Currently, Prof. Chaturvedi is also Independent Director on the Board of Reserve Bank of India.



Dr Shahidur Rashid

Director, South Asia Office, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)

Dr Shahidur Rashid is the Director for the South Asia Office, part of the Development Strategies and Governance Unit, and is based in New Delhi. He is committed to seeing tangible change take place in South Asia. Dr Rashid has worked on agriculture and food policy issues in Asia and Africa for more than 20 years at IFPRI. As a Senior Research Fellow, he managed several large multi-country projects, fundraising, and influencing policymaking and investment priorities in Ethiopia and Bangladesh. He was based in IFPRI's regional office in Addis Ababa for five years to conduct research on countries in East and Southern Africa. Dr Rashid's research work at IFPRI has included institutional analysis of micro-finance, agricultural wage dynamics, food aid leakage, food grain markets integration, distortions to agricultural incentives, and agricultural price policies in Asia. Dr Rashid has also served as a member of the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). Among other research, he contributed to a set of diagnostic studies for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that provided the basis for the establishment of the Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) in Ethiopia. He also co-led the African Agriculture Management Program (AAMP), jointly managed by IFPRI and the Michigan State University. He has co-edited several books.



H.E. Mr Indra Mani Pandey

Secretary General, BIMSTEC

His Excellency Indra Mani Pandey, is a career diplomat of India. He joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1990. Before his current assignment, he served as Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations and Other International organizations in Geneva. He had earlier served as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs in-charge of Disarmament & International Security Affairs Division. During his 33 years long career as an Indian diplomat, Ambassador Pandey has served as Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman. Before his Ambassadorial assignment in Muscat, he served as Deputy Ambassador of India to France and Consul General of India at Guangzhou, China. Ambassador Pandey had also served in various diplomatic capacities at Indian Missions in Cairo (Egypt), Damascus (Syria), Islamabad (Pakistan), Kabul (Afghanistan) and Permanent Mission of India to the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva (Switzerland).



Professor S. K. Mohanty

Professor, RIS

Professor S. K. Mohanty is presently working at Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS). His research interests include international trade issues, regional trading arrangements, WTO issues, MSMEs, technology-intensive trade, Environmentally Sensitive Goods, Blue Economy, Fishery Subsidy and CGE modelling. He has been working on India's regional economic interest with certain countries including Japan, Mauritius, Oman, China, the US, Canada, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, etc. and regional groupings like SAARC, BIMSTEC, IORA, BRICS, IBSA, GCC, IPEF, TPP, TTIP, COMESA, CLMV, the European Union, SEO, SACU-India-Mercosur (SIM). He was a member of several Committees set up by the Government of India, including Joint Study Groups (JSGs) reports for initiating FTA negotiations, Committee on GATS Negotiations in WTO by MoCI and Committee for the Twelfth Five Year Plan on Technology Intensity in India's Manufacturing Exports. He taught at JNU as well. He published several papers in both national and international journals. He was the co-chair of the T20 task force on trade and investment during the recent Indian G20 Presidency. He was also Chair of the IORA Academic Group during India's presidency and Academic focal point for more than a decade. Presently, his academic pursuits are centred on FTAs and the complexities of agricultural value chains in the BIMSTEC region, reflecting his research for understanding the complexities of international trade and development.



Dr Smita Sirohi

Principal Scientist, ICAR

Dr Smita Sirohi is Principal Scientist at ICAR and carried-out the responsibilities of Joint Secretary, G-20, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Government of India. Prior to this, she served as Adviser (Agri. & Marine Products) to Government of India, based at Embassy of India for Belgium, Luxembourg & European Union, Brussels. She also served as Head of Department, Dairy Economics, Statistics & Management at the National Dairy Research Institute, Karnal. Dr Sirohi has been a member of several policy-making and expert committees of national importance in the field of agriculture and dairy. She has to her credit over 100 publications in Journals, 4 books, several contributions in policy documents, a number of book chapters, articles and review papers.



Dr Kalpana Sastry

Managing Director, AgHub Foundation

Dr Kalpana Sastry is the Managing Director at Ag-Hub Foundation at Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University (PJTSAU), Hyderabad. She is a distinguished Agricultural Scientist with nearly three decades of expertise in the areas of Agriculture Research, Technology Commercialization, Intellectual Property and Innovation Management, Entrepreneurship and Start-up ecosystem development. Dr Sastry joined the Agricultural Research Service under ICAR in 1984 and as faculty in National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (NAARM) in 1996 where she worked in various capacities. She has also worked as a faculty at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS).



Dr Biswash Gauchan

Executive Director, Institute for Integrated Development Studies, Nepal

Dr Biswash Gauchan is the Executive Director at the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS). He served in UNDP both in Nepal and Africa for 10 years in different capacities and went on to become a Chief Executive Officer of a Commercial Bank in South Sudan where he served for two years. He is the founder chairman of Shangri-la Development Bank and co-founder of Quest International College and Omega International School. He writes extensively on economic policy and geo-strategic issues relating to Nepal and South Asia. He is a Fellow Chartered Accountant and holds a Ph.D. degree in Economics.



Dr Devesh Roy

Senior Research Fellow, IFPRI

Dr Devesh Roy is a Senior Research Fellow at the IFPRI's Development Strategies and Governance Unit based in the South Asia Office in New Delhi. He has conducted research on issues relating to food safety, agri-food trade, food security in South Asian countries and contract farming in high value agriculture in India. He holds a PhD in Economics from the University of Maryland at College Park and a Masters' degree from Delhi School of Economics, India. His areas of expertise include international trade, environment, firm and farm linkages and food safety.



Dr Manoj Thibbotuwawa

Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies, Sri Lanka

Dr Manoj Thibbotuwawa is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS) with research interests in agriculture, agribusiness value chains, food security, climate change and environmental and natural resource economics. He has more than 19 years of research experience at IPS. He has collaborated and served as a consultant to several international organisations such as the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Food Policy Research Organization (IFPRI), the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union (EU), and the World Bank. Dr Manoj holds a BSc (Agriculture) with Honours from the University of Peradeniya, an MSc (Agricultural Economics) from the Post-Graduate Institute of Agriculture at the University of Peradeniya, and a PhD from the University of Western Australia.



Dr Suresh Babu

Senior Research Fellow and Head of Capacity Strengthening, IFPRI

Dr Suresh Babu is a Senior Research Fellow in the Development Strategies and Governance Unit at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Head of IFPRI's program on Learning and Capacity Strengthening. His research areas include human and organizational strengthening of food policy systems, policy processes, and agricultural extension in developing countries. Over the past 23 years at IFPRI (Washington DC), he has been involved in institutional and human capacity strengthening for higher education and research in many countries in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, including, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda. He coordinated IFPRI's Central Asia program, South Asia Initiative and was also the program coordinator for the Agricultural Open Curriculum and Learning Initiative (AGROCURI), a consortium of 40 partners from CGIAR centers, universities in developing and developed countries, and international organizations. Before joining IFPRI in 1992 as a Research Fellow, Dr Babu was a Research Economist at Cornell University, New York. After completing his M.Sc. and Ph.D. (Economics) from Iowa State University, USA, he has been associated with many projects related to agriculture including food security, nutrition, poverty reduction, bio-

fuels, bio-energy, agricultural extension. He has published more than 100 peer reviewed articles in journals and authored/edited 20 books and research monographs. He is also Extraordinary Professor at the University of Pretoria.



Dr Mahfuz Kabir

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

Dr Mahfuz Kabir is Research Director at Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Dhaka. He obtained PhD in Economics from School of Economics and Finance, Curtin University, Australia (Thesis Title: Trade Response to Economic Regionalism in BIMSTEC). As a professional economist, he has experience in research and teaching for 23 years at home and abroad. His areas of research interest include trade and regional integration, BIMSTEC and SAARC, macroeconomics, social protection, poverty, human development, climate change, disasters and risk management, ecosystem accounting, and development discourse. He has published more than 100 articles, working papers, book chapters and policy papers from home and abroad.



Mr Abhinav Shukla

Regional Head – North India, Agri Business Division, ITC Limited, India

Mr. Abhinav Shukla, Regional Head ITC-ABD is currently leading the Agri-commodity operations for North India, spanning across the functions of Procurement, Sales, Supply Chain, Finance and HR. He has 12+ years of experience in Supply Chain Strategy & Design, Procurement, Sales, Logistics Planning & Operations, Factory Operations and implementation of Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning based Digital tools across the Agri. & FMCG Value Chain. Prior to his current role, he has led ITC-Agri-Business Division's AI/ML & Digital function to leverage Advanced Analytics & new age digital tools to solve complexities in Commodity Procurement & Supply Chain covering multiple projects in the area of Wheat procurement & distribution spanning across 7 States, 350+ Mandis and 32 Atta factories. This enabled sourcing decisions for a spend of Rs. 3000 + Cr. through multiple sourcing channels and distribution decisions via the modes of Road, Rail and Coastal in a highly complex network and deliver sustainable monetary benefit to the bottom line.



Mr Abul Kamar

Senior Research Analyst, South Asia Office, IFPRI

Mr. Abul Kamar is a Senior Research Analyst in the Development Strategies and Governance Unit, based in the South Asia Office in New Delhi. Presently, he works on the Regional Trade and Agricultural Transformation in the Bay of Bengal Countries project and the Agricultural Transformation and Market Integration in the ASEAN Region project. His research interests include trade in agriculture, regional trade agreements, climate change, and poverty. Prior to joining IFPRI, he worked with the Government of India's Ministries of Commerce and Industry and of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, where he provided analytical inputs for India's position on various cross-cutting issues of international trade including regional trade agreements.



Professor Prabir De

Professor, CMEC, RIS

Dr **Prabir De** is Professor, Centre of Maritime and Connectivity (CMEC) at RIS. He has over three and half decades of full-time research and teaching experiences in India and abroad. He works in the field of international economics and has research interests in international trade and development. He has been conducting policy research for the Government of India and several national and international organisations including UN agencies and multilateral development banks. Graduated in economics from the Scottish Church College in Kolkata, he did his Masters in economics from the Calcutta University and Ph.D. in economics from the Jadavpur University, Kolkata. He was a Visiting Fellow of the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE-JETRO), Japan; Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI); Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP); and Visiting Senior Fellow of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). He has contributed several research papers in international journals and written books on trade and development. He is also the Founding Editor of the Journal of Asian Economic Integration, published by Sage, and Journal of Land Ports and Border Economy, published by Routledge.



Dr P K Anand

Visiting Fellow, RIS

Dr P.K. Anand is a Visiting Fellow at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), since completion of his stint at the NITI Aayog, the think-tank of Government of India and successor to Planning Commission, where he was the lead for SDGs, Development Monitoring & Evaluation, Plan Appraisal and also handled International Cooperation, G-20, Industry, etc. He is equipped with PhD in Economics; and M.Sc. in Physics, and in Economics, latter from London School of Economics; Fellow, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade. As a member of the Indian Administrative Service he served in ministries of textiles, defence, and rural development of Government of India; and headed at district and divisional levels besides handling Co-operative and Public Sector units and serving in education and industry departments in Government of Rajasthan. At RIS, Dr Anand is handling the work streams related to Localisation of SDGs and Indices, progress, implementation, monitoring & evaluation of SDGs; Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) for SDGs; South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation on SDGs; Sustainable Agriculture, Food & Nutrition security and Water.



Dr Mirza Mofazzal Islam

Former Director General, Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture, Bangladesh

Dr Mirza Mofazzal Islam joined as Director General of Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) during March 2020 to May 2024. He was involved in Plant Breeding research; and Research and Management for 30 years. He holds a doctorate degree in Genetics and Plant Breeding from the University of the Philippines Los Banos and Post-doctoral degree in Molecular Genetics from Cornell University. He developed 25 high yielding and stress tolerant crop varieties. In recognition of his research, he received the 'Outstanding Achievement Award' from FAO-IAEA of the United Nations in 2014, Gold Medal from the Bangladesh Academy of Agriculture. He was also awarded from Bill and the Melinda Gates Foundation Project of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). He has worked as an expert in nuclear agriculture research in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Sierra Leone under the IAEA projects. He has published 206 research articles.



Professor Jeevika Weerahewa

Senior Professor, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

Professor Jeevika Weerahewa is the Senior Professor of Agricultural Economics attached to the Department of Agricultural Economics and Business Management, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. She obtained her BSc and MPhil from the University of Peradeniya and PhD from the University of Guelph, Canada. She has served as the Head of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Business Management, Faculty of Agriculture and Chairperson of the Board of Study in Agricultural Economics at the Postgraduate Institute of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya and as the Chair of Sri Lanka Forum of University Economists. Dr Weerahewa currently serves as an Honorary Fellow at the Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences, University of Melbourne, Australia.



Dr Devendra Gauchan

Adjunct Professor, IAAS, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Dr Devendra Gauchan is an Adjunct Professor of Agricultural Economics at the Institute of Agriculture & Animal Sciences (IAAS), Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu and a Senior Research Fellow at Institute of Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), Kathmandu, Nepal. He is also an Honorary Research Fellow at the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT (CGIAR), Rome Italy. Previously, he was a Senior Scientist & Head of Socioeconomics & Agricultural Research Policy Division at Nepal Agricultural Research Council (NARC) of the Government of Nepal, Kathmandu. He holds a PhD Degree from the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom and Post-Doctoral study from the International Rice Research Institute, Philippines. He has over 25 years of post-graduate experience in agriculture R&D, agricultural value chain, food system, agrobiodiversity and agricultural trade and policy. He has worked as a researcher, co-investigator, project manager, visiting professor and policy expert both in Nepal and overseas and contributed to the drafting of some important national agriculture and food systems policies and programs in Nepal. He has published over 100 research papers and served as speaker in several national and international Conferences and Workshops. He is currently General Secretary of Nepalese Agricultural Economics Society of Nepal and actively involved in agricultural development and policy issues in Nepal.



Mr Aleen Mukherjee

Agri Business Consultant

Mr. Aleen Mukherjee is an agriculture professional with 27 years of extensive experience across India and Africa. His expertise spans various domains within the agribusiness ecosystem, including strategic planning, business development, and large-scale project implementation. Mr. Mukherjee has successfully held leadership roles, such as Executive VP at NCDEX, and COO of NICR where he spearheaded initiatives in market research, farmer engagement, and electronic warehouse receipt systems. His international assignments include projects with USAID, FAO, and the World Bank. Mr. Mukherjee's academic credentials include a Master's in Agriculture from G.B. Pant University, supplemented by executive education from IIM Ahmedabad and Wharton. Currently, he is an independent Agribusiness Consultant based in New Delhi.



Ms Naureen Ahsan

Additional Foreign Secretary (Research), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh

Ms. Naureen Ahsan, a career diplomat of 15th batch of BCS (Foreign Affairs) cadre, joined Foreign Service in 1995. Currently she is serving at the ministry as Director General of Research Wing. In her diplomatic career, she has served in Bangladesh missions in Pretoria, The Hague and Ottawa in different capacities. At the headquarters as well, she has held several important positions. For a very brief period, she also served on deputation as a Director at the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA).



Dr Orachos Napisintuwong

Faculty of Economics, Kasetsart University, Thailand

Dr Orachos Napisintuwong is an Associate Professor and Deputy Department Head of International Affairs at Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Kasetsart University. Her teaching and research areas are economics of biotechnology, consumer preferences, economic analysis of technology adoption and diffusion, seed industry, sustainable agriculture, food system and food policy in Southeast Asia. She also serves as Executive Committee Member of Agricultural Economic Society of Thailand under Royal Patronage; Member of Board of Directors, Asia Pacific Agricultural Policy Forum; Country Contract Partner, Food and

Fertilizer Technology Centre for the Asian and Pacific Region (FFTC) and Director of Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy Research, Capacity, and Influence (PRCI) in Southeast Asia. She is also Editor of Asian Journal of Applied Economics, a book review editor of Asian Journal of Agriculture and Development and associate editor of Agro Ekonoki published by University of Gadjah Mada. She received her Ph.D. in Food and Resource Economics from University of Florida.



Dr Arun Padiyar Panemangalore

Lead, World Fish

Dr Arun Padiyar is a Fisheries & Aquaculture Specialist from India. At present he is serving as the Country Lead of CGIAR-WorldFish for India. He has 25 years of experience in this sector, especially in public policies & programs, planning & implementation of aquaculture development projects in Asia and Pacific region including in India, China, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, Solomon Islands and Palestinian territories for various international organisations such as NACA, FAO, World Bank Group etc. Also, he has served in private sector in Indian aquaculture for 6 years. He has earned his Bachelors and Masters in Fisheries Science from University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore, India and PhD in aquatic animal health management from Deakin University, Australia.



Dr Anil K Dixit

Principal Scientist, ICAR-National Dairy Research Institute

Dr Anil Kumar Dixit, with over 23 years of experience in the National Agricultural Research System, is currently serving as Principal Scientist (Agricultural Economics) in the Division of Dairy Economics, Statistics, and Management at the ICAR-National Dairy Research Institute, Karnal. He has made significant contributions toward the establishment of the new VCSG College of Horticulture, Bharsar, GBPUA&T, Pantnagar. Subsequently, he joined ICAR and served in coordinating unit of AICRP on Post-Harvest Engineering and Technology, ICAR-CIPHET Ludhiana. He was involved in planning and monitoring the progress of 30 centres across the country. He is recipient of ICAR-Dr Rajendra Prasad Puruskar for Technical Book in 2015 and Young Scientist Award (Social Sciences)-2010, conferred by Indian Society of Hill Agriculture. Dr Dixit has handled several external funded (05) and in-house projects (10) of national priority. As part of his efforts toward the goal of a “Digital India,” he developed the mobile

app “Milksafecon” for recording and retrieving dairy farm data and to keep track of food safety and hygiene score. He was also involved in development of software for data recording and estimation of storage losses in FCI and CWC (in association with ICAR-IASRI, New Delhi). He mapped the value chain of ICAR-NDRI dairy start-ups. He has authored or co-authored over sixty-five research papers/articles, and delivered several invited lectures (>25 Nos) in summer / winter schools, farmers and other stakeholders trainings, published book chapters (7), technical/ extension bulletins (5), popular and extension articles (15).



Dr Sendhil R.

Associate Professor, Pondicherry University

Dr Sendhil R presently serves as an Associate Professor in the Department of Economics, School of Management, Pondicherry University, and is a former employee of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). He has been with the ICAR-Indian Institute of Wheat and Barley Research (IIWBR), Karnal, between 2011 and 2022 (January), and also associated with the ICAR-National Dairy Research Institute, Karnal, between 2014 and 2022 (January) in teaching & mentoring PG and Ph.D. scholars. He is an agricultural economist with around 17 years of total professional experience, including an experience of around 10.5 years in wheat and barley research on production, marketing & policy prescription, and around 10 years of experience in teaching and mentorship. He has published 126 research papers in peer-reviewed national and international journals of high repute, 11 edited/ authored books, and presented his research proposals/ findings at various events held in the USA, Canada, Italy, Australia, South Korea, Japan, and Ghana. He’s interested in teaching agricultural economics, and executing transdisciplinary and multi-institutional research on Food Policy, Value Chain, Market Outlook, and Climate Change to foster innovations and policy formulation leading to agricultural transformation.



Dr Pankhuri Gaur

Assistant Professor, RIS

Dr Gaur is Assistant Professor at Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS). Her areas of interest are international trade, including multilateralism and regionalism. Recent work covers different forms of trade agreements – bilateral, regional, trans-regional agreements or Mega-Regional trade agreements. She is also working on Blue Economy,

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), and Maritime Issues. She has also participated as a member of the Indian team for the India-Mauritius Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Partnership Agreement (CECPA) Joint Study Group (JSG) Report Meeting, 2017-18. She has been writing on issues related to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Latin American and Caribbean, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), EU, BIMSTEC, South Asia, etc.



Mr CSR Ram

Joint Secretary, BIMSTEC and SAARC, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India

Ambassador Ram is a career diplomat belonging to Indian Foreign Service. Presently he is Joint Secretary in Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi as National Coordinator of India for BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical & Economic Cooperation) and SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), the organizations for regional integration in the regions of Bay of Bengal and South Asia respectively. Ambassador Ram began his diplomatic career at the Indian Mission in Moscow (2003-2006). Later, he served in the Indian Diplomatic Missions in Jakarta (2008-2011) and in New York (2011-2014). He was Consul General of India in Munich, Germany (2016-2020). He also served at the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi dealing with India's relations with Sri Lanka (2006-2008) and Pakistan (2015-2016) and with External Publicity & Public Diplomacy (2016). Ambassador Ram was High Commissioner of India to Ghana from January 2020 till June 2023. He has authored several publications, including 'Connecting Dots: Reaching Out to the People' and 'India Ghana Dialogue: Strengthening South-South Cooperation'. Ambassador Ram by education is B. Tech. in Electronics and M. Phil. in Geography. Among foreign languages, he speaks Russian and also knows Bahasa Indonesia and German.



H.E. Mr Md. Mustafizur Rahman

High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India

H.E. Mr. Md. Mustafizur Rahman is the High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India. Prior to joining this position, Mr. Rahman served as the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN Offices and other International Organizations in Geneva and as the Ambassador of Bangladesh to Switzerland. He also served as the High

Commissioner of Bangladesh to Singapore. A career diplomat, Mr. Md. Mustafizur Rahman joined the Bangladesh Foreign Service in 1993. During his long service, Mr. Rahman served as the Deputy Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations in New York, the Deputy High Commissioner of Bangladesh in Kolkata, India. He held other various diplomatic positions in the Bangladesh Missions in Geneva, New York and Paris. He also served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka in different capacities including as the Director General of the United Nations Wing.



H.E. Dr Shankar Prasad Sharma

Ambassador, Embassy of Nepal

H.E. Dr. Shankar Prasad Sharma, is a senior Economist and Diplomat who is currently serving as the Ambassador of Nepal to India. He is former Nepalese Ambassador to the United States. Formerly a member of the government of Nepal, Dr. Sharma held numerous positions such as Deputy Chairman at the National Planning Commission in Nepal (1999–2006), Chief Advisor in Ministry of Finance, Alternate Governor of Nepal for the International Monetary Fund and Senior Economist in Institute of South East Asian Studies (1986–1993). He has a Masters and Ph.D. in economics from the University of Hawaii. Dr. Sharma also worked as a consultant to the Constitution Committee on “Distribution of Natural Resources, Economic Rights and Public Revenue” in helping to draft the new Constitution of Nepal. Dr. Sharma has an extensive experience in government, international institutions and economic research. Before joining the National Planning Commission as a Member in 1997, he worked as a Senior Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance, Nepal; a Senior Economist in the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore; and a Fellow in the East-West Center, Hawaii. He also served as a Professor of Economics in the Centre for Economic Development and Administration, Tribhuvan University. As a highest-level development planner in Nepal, Dr. Sharma provided leadership for national planning, policy guidance, programme development and monitoring. Dr. Sharma has published eight books (edited or authored) and more than fifty articles on the economy, energy and the environment of the Asia-Pacific region including Nepal. He is also the Immediate Past President of the East-West Center Association, Nepal.



H.E. Ms Kshenuka Dhireni Senewiratne

High Commissioner for the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

H.E. Ms Kshenuka Dhireni Senewiratne is the High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to the Republic of India. She served as the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Thailand from 2015 to 2019, while being concurrently accredited to Lao; appointed Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs in January 2014, subsequent to having served as Additional Secretary of the Ministry from July 2011, Ambassador & Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in Geneva from 2008 to 2010 and also as High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to the UK with concurrent accreditation to Ireland from 2005 to 2008. Ms Senewiratne has been a member of the Sri Lanka delegation to the UN General Assembly sessions, UN Human Rights Council sessions, Non Aligned Summit and Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings on a number of occasions. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, she has served as the Director General/Economic Affairs, Director/UN & Multilateral Affairs and Political Affairs (West) and Assistant Director/Public Communications. She is a graduate in Economics from the University of Salford, UK and subsequently a MA in International Relations from the University of Colombo. Ms Senewiratne is a member of the Sri Lanka Foreign Service since 1985.

Glimpses of the Conference





RIS A Think-Tank of Developing Countries

Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) is a New Delhi-based autonomous policy research institute that specialises in issues related to international economic development, trade, investment and technology. RIS is envisioned as a forum for fostering effective policy dialogue and capacity-building among developing countries on global and regional economic issues.

The focus of the work programme of RIS is to promote South-South Cooperation and collaborate with developing countries in multilateral negotiations in various forums. RIS is engaged across inter-governmental processes of several regional economic cooperation initiatives. Through its intensive network of think tanks, RIS seeks to strengthen policy coherence on international economic issues and the development partnership canvas.

For more information about RIS and its work programme, please visit its website: www.ris.org.in



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**Research and Information System
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विकासशील देशों की अनुसंधान एवं सूचना प्रणाली

Core IV-B, Fourth Floor, India Habitat Centre
Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110 003 India., Ph. 91-11-24682177-80
Fax: 91-11-24682173-74, Email: dgoffice@ris.org.in
Website: <http://www.ris.org.in>

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