



Fourth Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue

7th – 8th May 2024
Colombo, Sri Lanka



“hd

Centre for
Humanitarian
Dialogue

Mediation for peace

About the Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue

Since 2021, the Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue has emerged as a pivotal platform for fostering regional cooperation and addressing critical maritime challenges. Co-hosted by the Pathfinder Foundation (PF) and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), the Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue convenes high-level government officials, regional leaders and international experts to identify strategies for reducing the risk of maritime conflict and mitigating the impact of marine environmental degradation in the Bay of Bengal. The annual event has garnered significant participation from Bay of Bengal littoral states and other key stakeholders, including regional organisations and diplomatic missions. By facilitating open dialogue and collaborative initiatives, the Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue continues to play a crucial role in enhancing regional stability and cooperation.

Cover Photo: Fisher folk mending nets during the seasonal fishing ban – Patuakhali, Bangladesh © Mashiati Noor Prapti

Fourth Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue

7th and 8th May 2024

Outcome Document

On 7th and 8th May 2024, the Pathfinder Foundation (PF) and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) co-hosted the Fourth Track 1.5 Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to promote greater regional maritime cooperation in the region. Participants included high-level government officials, heads of regional organisations, and representatives from prominent think tanks from the littoral states of the Bay of Bengal (including Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand). His Excellency Indra Mani Pandey, Secretary General of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), delivered the plenary address and Dr. Ram Madhav, President, India Foundation, delivered the keynote address. Ambassadors from Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Egypt, Indonesia, Italy, Netherlands, Republic of Korea, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand and the United States of America accredited to Sri Lanka graced the plenary session. Senior diplomats from China, India, Iran, Maldives, Malaysia, Myanmar, and New Zealand were also present during the opening ceremony.

Participants acknowledged the achievements reached since the Third Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue in 2023, including the progress made by the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Maritime Security Cooperation in adopting Guiding Principles for Law Enforcement Agencies for Interaction at Sea as well as the BIMSTEC Guidelines for Maritime Component of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. Additionally, the launch of the BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network (BIMReN) by the Indian Government in February 2024, following the Kochi Declaration¹ in 2023, was also lauded as an important initiative. This outcome document summarises some key takeaways of the discussions² and recommendations for greater regional maritime cooperation in the Bay of Bengal.³

Harmonising Regional Policies and Frameworks for Enhanced Maritime Governance and Cooperation

1. High-level representatives and experts from BIMSTEC and its member states, and regional organisations like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO), offered insights into the existing collaborative endeavours in the region, including the proposed memorandum of understanding between BIMSTEC and IORA. Participants welcomed the 29-point agenda prepared by BIMSTEC on maritime security and suggested exploring synergies between BIMSTEC's 29-point agenda and the Dialogue's themes. The need to incorporate other stakeholders such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Maldives etc. into discussions concerning the Bay of Bengal was highlighted. Potential areas requiring urgent collaboration identified

¹ Kochi Declaration is the result of a dialogue on the development of a marine fisheries research network hosted by HD in collaboration with the Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO), which in turn emerged from the outcomes from the 2022 Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue.

² All panel discussions were held under Chatham House Rules.

³ As in previous Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogues, the outcomes of the latest Dialogue will be made available to the governments of the region as well as relevant regional organisations, including BIMSTEC, IORA and the BOBP-IGO.

include crisis coordination, fisheries management, data gathering and information sharing. There was a consensus that organisations like BIMSTEC, BOBP-IGO and IORA should be invited to future editions of the Dialogue at a high level. The possibility of involving the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Colombo Security Conclave, India Ocean Naval Symposium and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative should be explored. The participation of India's national coordinator for BIMSTEC was welcomed and the need to secure the presence of other national coordinators in the next round was highlighted.

Maritime Crisis Management and Communications in the Bay of Bengal

2. Participants underscored the strategic value of the Bay of Bengal as a critical artery for trade and sea lines of communication, while emphasising the region's susceptibility to maritime threats and disasters. Central to the discussions was the need to bolster institutional frameworks and mechanisms in maritime crisis management and communications, including strengthening regional maritime information sharing platforms, streamlining communication protocols and establishing dedicated hotlines for enhanced coordination during emergencies.
3. The important role being played by Information Fusion Centres (IFCs) in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) in augmenting maritime domain awareness and fostering information sharing among regional stakeholders was highlighted. Drawing inspiration from frameworks established by IORA and ASEAN, participants felt there was considerable scope for countries in the Bay of Bengal region to learn from the best practices of ASEAN and other organization in the IOR to explore collaborative approaches to strengthen crisis communication channels and address key challenges.

From Cooperation to Action - Transboundary Fisheries Management in the Bay of Bengal

4. Participants welcomed the progress made since the last Dialogue in 2023, especially the establishment of the BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network (BIMReN) by India and the role played in implementation by BOBP-IGO. Participants emphasised the importance of collaborative research in addressing data deficiencies and progressing towards sustainable fisheries management. Joint fish stock assessment and marine scientific research emerged as critical avenues for developing robust institutional frameworks to effectively manage marine resources in the region. It was recommended that efforts be made to identify and collate information already available in the public domain of the littoral states and establish protocols for sharing this information to concerned stakeholders.
5. Participants welcomed the proposals made by the Director of BOBP-IGO to translate collaborative efforts into actionable policies. His proposal for a joint research vessel for the region, similar to RV Nansen which is supported by Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation and operated by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, was welcomed by all. The representative of India informed participants that the Ministry of External Affairs would engage in inter-ministerial consultations within the country on this proposal. The proposal to establish a regional fisheries management organisation (RFMO) was also welcomed. Participants called for further discussions on establishing a legal and institutional framework for the assessment and monitoring of shared transboundary marine fisheries resources in the Bay of Bengal.

Exploring Climate-Informed Policy Options for Marine Resource Management

6. Participants examined the impact of climate on marine resources and coastal communities in the region. Particular attention was paid to the use of seasonal fishing bans as a collaborative tool to manage shared marine resources like fisheries. Representatives from the littoral states shared their experiences of implementing seasonal fishing bans and highlighted the need for a coordinated approach if the bans were to be efficient and successful. Participants also stressed the need to safeguard the livelihoods and welfare of coastal communities. The necessity of continuous engagement between the littoral states and the role of state and provincial governments within countries as well as the Maritime Law Enforcement Agencies (MLEAs) in enforcing the ban were also reiterated. Participants called for continued discussions on this important topic in future dialogues and for efforts to guide concrete action by the governments of the region.

Racing Against Time – Dealing with Disasters in the Bay of Bengal

7. Participants examined the impact of past disaster response efforts in shaping current humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) capabilities in the Bay of Bengal region. Discussions focused on leveraging lessons learned to develop institutional architecture for enhanced preparedness and response mechanisms for future disasters. The progress made on the BIMSTEC Guidelines for Maritime Component of HADR was welcomed as a positive step.
8. The importance of community engagement in cultivating effective disaster resilience and the potential establishment of a regional crisis coordination centre to enhance disaster cooperation were highlighted as areas for continued engagement at this Dialogue, as well as outside of it. As an immediate next step, a joint table-top exercise involving MLEAs of the littoral states, titled Bay of Bengal Cooperation and Training (BOBCAT), was identified as a potential way to solidify shared commitments to maritime partnerships in the region.

IUU Fishing in the Bay of Bengal – Exploring Responses, Cultivating Resilience and Facilitating Repatriation

9. Participants explored the detrimental effects of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities on the livelihoods, safety and well-being of fishing communities in the Bay of Bengal. Discussions underlined the need for cohesive and synchronised efforts to mitigate the pernicious effects of IUU fishing as well as promoting humanitarian treatment of fishers in the Bay of Bengal. Participants also stressed the need for inclusive and gender-responsive approaches while adopting pathways to provide redress and support to affected fishing communities. Attention was drawn to the fact that disputes regarding IUU fishing straddled many countries. Participants highlighted the need for a regional management framework on fisheries-related issues, over and above bilateral discussions underway between India and Sri Lanka, as well as India and Bangladesh.



Pathfinder Foundation is a premier think tank that has played a catalytic role in research and analysis aimed at contributing to economic policy reforms in Sri Lanka. Over the years, it has established a wide network of partner organizations worldwide, thereby enhancing bilateral and multilateral partnerships to promote economic, social and political development, in addition to its security and strategic focus. Serving as a platform to engage in critical thinking and cross-disciplinary analysis, Pathfinder Foundation aims to increase knowledge and raise awareness of salient issues with relevant stakeholders locally and internationally.



The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) is a Swiss-based private diplomacy organisation founded on the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. HD's mission is to help prevent, mitigate, and resolve armed conflict through dialogue and mediation. HD uses the tools of private diplomacy to expand the space for the non-violent resolution of armed conflict. It opens channels of communication and mediates between parties in conflict, facilitates dialogue, provides support to the broader mediation and peacebuilding community, carries out capacity building work, and conducts research on mediation issues. HD deploys its expertise to support local processes that protect civilians and foster lasting and just peace.