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CMFRI

Report of the BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network (BIMReN)

First Regional Partners Conclave

04 November 2025

ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research institute (CMFRI), Kochi

BIMReN

BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network (BIMReN)

BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network (BIMReN)

First Regional Partners Conclave

Launch of BIMREN 2.0

04 Nov 2025 | 1230 – 1430 hours
ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research institute (CMFRI), Kochi

Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO)
91, Saint Mary's Road, Abiramapuram, Chennai - 600 018. INDIA

About the Organisers

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is the government body responsible for managing India's foreign relations and international diplomacy. It formulates and implements India's foreign policy, promotes bilateral and multilateral cooperation, and safeguards the country's interests abroad. The Ministry also oversees diplomatic missions, development cooperation, and consular services, including passport and visa-related matters. The MEA implements and supports several international cooperation programmes and initiatives, including the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme, Development Partnership Administration (DPA) projects, BIMSTEC cooperation initiatives, Indian Ocean regional cooperation programmes, capacity-building initiatives, technical assistance projects, and partnerships aimed at sustainable development, maritime security, trade, connectivity, and regional collaboration among partner countries.

Bay of Bengal Inter Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO)

The BOBP-IGO is a regional fisheries advisory body with Bangladesh, India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka as its contracting parties. It is mandated to enhance cooperation amongst its member countries and other countries (especially, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand) for sustainable fisheries management in the Bay of Bengal region. The BOBP-IGO Secretariat is located in Chennai. The Department of Fisheries, Government of India is the nodal agency from India and the hosting agency.

ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI)

The ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), established in 1947 and later integrated into ICAR in 1967, has evolved into a globally recognized center for tropical marine fisheries research. It has made significant contributions through its national catch estimation system, development of mariculture technologies, and advancements in marine biotechnology and climate research. CMFRI's multidisciplinary work, including its efforts in data collection, resource management, and women led bivalve farming, has positioned it as a premier institute in both capture and culture fisheries.

Report Preparation

This report on the "BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network (BIMReN) First Regional Partners Conclave" is prepared by BOBP-IGO.

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Executive Summary

The First Regional Partners Conclave of the BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network (BIMReN), held on 4 November 2025 at ICAR-CMFRI, Kochi alongside MECOS-4, brought together leading researchers, policymakers, and institutions from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. The Conclave reviewed progress under BIMReN 1.0.

Six transboundary collaborative research projects under the Twinning Programme presented significant achievements, including: field surveys and stock assessments in shared fisheries, development of climate finance tools for women fish processors, microplastic biofilm analysis, regional marine litter mapping in the Sundarbans, optimization of fisheries management regimes, and unified frameworks for Hilsa transboundary governance. These projects have already produced scientific outputs such as joint conference papers, plans for books and initiated faculty exchanges. BIMReN Split-site fellowship holders also participated.

Experts, including Dr. Cherdsak Virapat, Dr. J.K. Jena, and Amb. CSR Ram, emphasized BIMReN's strategic value as a high-impact, low-cost platform for regional marine cooperation. Key areas for future strengthening include: integrated regional research planning, stakeholder mapping, cross-ministerial coordination, capacity building, and alignment with global ocean governance mechanisms. Recommendations included establishing a Regional Centre of Excellence and producing a Bay of Bengal-focused publication similar to the 'World Ocean Review'.

The Conclave highlighted the importance of people-to-people exchanges and cross-border field collaborations, which have helped bridge longstanding institutional and national silos. The progress shown in shared stock assessments, climate-oriented governance, and ecosystem monitoring demonstrates the promise of harmonized methodologies and regionally aligned policy recommendations.

In closing, BOBP-IGO Director Dr. P. Krishnan announced plans to introduce a Regional Award for Championing Regional Cooperation at MECOS-5 and proposed establishing a BIMReN Marine Science Technology Centre to expand regional research capacity. The Conclave reaffirmed BIMReN as a flagship model for regional cooperation in the Bay of Bengal, laying strong foundations for an expanded BIMReN with broader participation and enhanced resources.

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BIMReN	BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BOBP-IGO	Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation
CIFRI	Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute
CIFT	Central Institute of Fisheries Technology
CIRDAP	Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific
CMFRI	Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute
CPUE	Catch Per Unit Effort
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DDG (Fy)	Deputy Director General (Fisheries)
DG	Director General
DPA	Development Partnership Administration
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GIS	Geographic Information System
ICAR	Indian Council of Agricultural Research
ICAR-CIFT	ICAR–Central Institute of Fisheries Technology
ICAR-CIFRI	ICAR–Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute
IFS	Indian Foreign Service
IOC	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission
IOI	International Ocean Institute
ITEC	Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MECOS	Marine Ecosystems – Challenges and Opportunities Symposium
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
NACA	Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SIST	Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology

SQL	Structured Query Language
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
TSA	Time Series Analysis
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WorldFish	International Research Organization for Fisheries and Aquaculture
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Participants at the Workshop

1. Inaugural Session, MECOS 4

The First Regional Partners Conclave of the BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network (BIMReN) was successfully held on November 4, 2025**,** at the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), Kochi**,** on the sidelines of the International Symposium on Marine Ecosystems – Challenges and Opportunities (MECOS-4)**.** The Symposium which brought together over 700 marine science researchers and policymakers from the region, was a fitting platform for the BIMREN partners from Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand to engage in discussions and presentations on pressing marine challenges, ecosystem health, and research innovations. The event served as an essential milestone in advancing regional cooperation on marine research and sustainable blue economy initiatives.

"We have maritime cooperation as the main thrust area for our engagement with our partner countries. As a part of that commitment, India has launched the BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network (BIMReN) and I have been benefited with our strong partnership with BOBP IGO and through it, with all the marine research institutions in India and in the member states of BIMSTEC", said Amb CSR Ram, Jt. Secretary (BIMSTEC & SAARC), MEA, Govt. of India, at the inauguration of MECOS 4. Dr P. Krishnan, Director, BOBP IGO gave an overview of BIMReN: BIMSTEC-India: Towards Strengthening Regional Cooperation. He said that Bay of Bengal accounts for 6% of the world's fish catch with over a third of world's fishing fleet plying here. He said that because of the extensive nature of shared fishery resources, cooperation among the researchers is essential to ensure collective sustainability outcomes. India, having a significant coastline along the Bay and prowess in marine research, launched BIMREN in 2024, which is testimony to its long-term commitment for sustainable fisheries management through regional cooperation. He outlined the components of the BIMReN programme which includes twinning research projects and split-site doctoral fellowships.

2. First Regional Partners Conclave

Following the inaugural session, the First Regional Partners Conclave was held in hybrid mode. The Principal Investigators of the six ongoing projects along with their collaborators attended the programme and made presentations on their projects. The dignitaries present included Amb. CSR Ram, IFS, *Jt. Secretary (BIMSTEC & SAARC), MEA, Govt. of India*, Dr. J.K. Jena, *DDG (Fy), ICAR, New Delhi* and Dr. Cherdsak Virapat, *Ex-DG, NACA & Ex-DG, CIRDAP*. Dr P Krishnan introduced the session. This was followed by presentations on the six projects, summarized below.

2.1. Project Presentations

2.1.1. Sustaining Fisheries Ecosystem in the Palk Bay Region: Assessing Management Options, Livelihoods and Fishers' Perspectives

This initiative where Tamil Nadu J Jayalalitha University is partnering with Jaffna University, and Rajarata University, Sri Lanka looks at the status of key shared resources. The presentation was made by Dr Lloyd Chrispin, TNJFU who said that to assess impacts on the seabed because of bottom trawling, five surveys had been completed and an extensive study on the trawl fishery had been completed.

The project is built on four major objectives: assessing the health of fisheries stocks, reviewing existing management frameworks, studying fisher perceptions and behaviours toward sustainable resource use, and synthesizing these findings into a comprehensive management plan. Considerable progress has already been made. Extensive field surveys have been

conducted, focusing on four shared-stock species—*Penaeus semisulcatus*, *Portunus pelagicus*, *Lethrinus lentjan*, and *Sardinella albella*—with additional species studied through length-frequency analysis. On the Sri Lankan side, five benthic surveys have been completed, fulfilling commitments and generating valuable ecological data. Parallel efforts are underway to analyze fishing gears, particularly trawlers, to better understand their impact on the ecosystem.

As part of the faculty exchange, Dr Chrispin had spent 45 days in Sri Lanka, where a workshop was organised with 25 government officials in Jaffna (?), where strategies for sustainable resource use were developed collaboratively; apart from a number of field visits that had been carried out. Social media coverage has amplified the visibility of these efforts, engaging wider communities. The Sri Lankan team is in India currently as part of the exchange programme. The project has already produced tangible outputs, including four abstracts submitted to the MECOS 4 conference. The team from Jaffna (Dr N Ragavan & Dr Senaviratne) observed that Indian institutions effectively link field research with laboratory innovations and connect findings back to fishermen and farmers. They noted the enthusiasm of students in India, suggesting that a student exchange program could further strengthen collaboration. They also emphasized the importance of policy changes and bottom-level sustainability practices, recognizing that the project's regional partnership is steering toward meaningful outcomes. They expressed their intent to adopt similar models, bridging the gap between research institutions and field realities, and to learn from India's advanced aquaculture and fisheries techniques.

2.1.2. Harnessing Climate Finance for Financial Inclusion of Small-Scale Women Fish Processors

Dr. Nikita Gopal presented the project where ICAR-CIFT is partnering with Sabaragamuwa University, Sri Lanka along with the Forum for Small Scale Fisheries, Sri Lanka. The key objective is to investigate the climate-induced disaster vulnerability of women and come up with appropriate solutions.

Since its inception, significant milestones have been achieved. The Sri Lankan team's first visit in January 2025 finalized the work plan, data collection tools, and training for field researchers. Fieldwork has been completed in Sri Lanka and on India's west coast, with the east coast survey underway. Systematic literature reviews and analysis protocols have been finalized, and the project has already produced two publications and several conference presentations. Indian team visit to Sri Lanka may be mentioned here. Collaborative outputs have emerged from exchange visits, including expert lectures for students at the University of Sabaragamuwa, opportunities for postgraduate and doctoral student exchanges, and the identification of technologies to improve dry fish processing in Sri Lanka. These include foldable stainless steel drying racks, perforated mesh trays, specialized dryers, and effluent treatment systems tailored for Maldive fish production. Standard operating procedures for dry fish production have also been shared, strengthening technical capacity.

Beyond technology transfer, the project has fostered institutional cross-learning. A notable achievement has been convincing the Agriculture Insurance Board of Sri Lanka to design a new insurance product specifically for small-scale women dry fish processors—a pioneering step in climate finance for fisheries. This outcome demonstrates the project's ability to translate research into tangible policy innovations.

Partners from Sri Lanka emphasized the value of collaboration, noting how the partnership between universities and research institutes has created new opportunities for training junior

staff and advancing climate finance instruments, which remain rare in the fisheries sector. They highlighted plans to publish a book on climate finance and fisheries, with contributions from international researchers, and to launch a certificate course on climate finance for final-year university students and research staff. This initiative will ensure that knowledge gained through the project is shared widely with young scholars and practitioners, strengthening future capacity.

2.1.3. "Studies on Microplastic- Biofilm Formation and its Co-Contaminated Effects on the Marine Environment

2.1.4. Unveiling the marine litters - Mapping, distribution and identification in the Indian and Bangladesh parts of Sundarbans Mangroves along the Bay of Bengal

Dr Sheela Rani, Director, Research, spoke about the two projects being led by Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology (India).

The study on microplastic biofilm formation led by Dr Ravi Mani is jointly with the Prince of Songkla University (Thailand). The research investigates how biofilms form on different types of microplastics, how toxic contaminants adhere to them, and how these contaminants transfer into marine organisms. Through combined field and laboratory studies, the team is analyzing contaminant accumulation, bioaccumulation, and toxicity in marine ecosystems. The teams have been actively collecting samples for analysis while carrying out training programmes especially in the use of advanced technologies like Micro-CT, lectures and field visits effectively expanding its engagement with the research community. 50 GB of metagenomic sequencing data has been generated and is being processed.

Beyond scientific inquiry, the collaboration emphasizes social awareness and outreach, engaging students and communities through workshops, exchange programs, and environmental education. This initiative empowers young researchers to champion ocean stewardship and strengthens ties between India and Thailand in the pursuit of a cleaner ocean.

A PhD student from the Prince of Songkla University, Miss Phatcharee Roekngande, is currently in SIST as a BIMReN split-site doctoral fellow. Dr Eknarin Rodcharoen, Dr Pornpimon Chuaduangpui, the project partnersalso participated. A short film on the project was also screened.

The second study led by Dr K. Govindaraju is a collaboration between Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology and Bangladesh Agricultural University, with additional support from IIT Madras. The Sundarbans, the world's largest contiguous mangrove forest, is a critical ecosystem bridging land and sea, home to diverse aquatic and terrestrial life. Yet it faces mounting threats from marine litter, microplastics, and pollutants transported across borders by the Bay of Bengal. This project seeks to map and analyze the transboundary distribution of marine litter in the Indian and Bangladeshi sectors of the Sundarbans, addressing one of the most pressing environmental challenges in the region. Joint workshops and exchange visits have strengthened cross-border research capacity and student engagement. The project aims to generate critical insights into pollution pathways and propose strategies for mitigation. The project underscores the importance of regional cooperation, as environmental challenges in shared ecosystems transcend political boundaries.

2.1.5. Fishery Management Regimes: Optimization and Innovation for the Blue Economy in the BOB Region

Dr. Shyam Salim and the team from CMFRI, along with partners from the University of Ruhuna and University of Wayamba in Sri Lanka, and University of Chittagong in Bangladesh, outlined progress in their project. The initiative evaluates positive and normative fisheries management tools across India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh to promote effective governance and stakeholder participation.

The initiative began with nine researchers but has already expanded to include many more institutes across Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The scale of collaboration was evident during the inception workshop, which saw active participation from vice chancellors and senior leadership of partner universities, underscoring the project's regional importance.

In just three months, the team has made significant progress. Stakeholders have been identified, workshops conducted, and schedules developed. Positive and normative tools have been mapped across three countries—India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka—covering eight different sites including Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Early findings suggest a relatively uniform set of management practices across these regions. The project has also developed its own logo and brochure, while systematic data collection and TSA protocols are underway. Faculty visits have begun, with Dr. Muslem Uddin initiating a 45-day exchange, to be followed by visits to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh by the Indian team in the coming months.

Speaking on behalf of the team, Dr. Muslem Uddin emphasized the project's focus on analyzing best management practices through two types of study stations: common stations shared across the three countries, and uncommon or distant stations unique to each. This dual approach will allow the team to evaluate which tools are most effective and adaptable across different contexts. He highlighted the importance of developing common strategies for ecosystem management, given that India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka share interconnected marine environments. With strong stakeholder engagement and regional cooperation, the project aims to deliver practical, effective management tools that can be adopted across borders.

2.1.6. Developing Trans-boundary Management Strategies for Hilsa fishery in the Bay of Bengal region under changing climate

Dr. Piyashi DebRoy from ICAR–CIFRI presented the project involving India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. The project "Developing Transboundary Management Strategies for Hilsa Fishery in the Bay of Bengal Region under Changing Climate" represents a landmark collaboration across India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. Led by ICAR-CIFRI, Barrackpore, the Indian partner is the Coastal Observatory and Outreach Centre, Vidyasagar University, and collaborators are Bangladesh Agricultural University, Noakhali Science and Technology University, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University, the Department of Fisheries, Myanmar and WorldFish, Myanmar.

Hilsa (*Tenualosa ilisha*), an anadromous migratory fish, is central to the livelihoods of nearly 250 million people in the Ganga–Brahmaputra–Meghna river basin. Yet, its stocks are in decline due to climate change, dam and barrage construction, and other shared transboundary pressures. Recognizing this, the project sets out the following four major objectives:

1. **Unified Database Development** – compiling and harmonizing fishery statistics from India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, including catch data, CPUE (catch per unit effort), and stock assessments. Work is underway using SQL Server, with consideration of open-access availability.

2. **Stock Characterization** – field surveys and sample collection across the Hooghly (India), Meghna (Bangladesh), and Ayeyarwady (Myanmar) rivers, using otolith elemental analysis to study population structure.
3. **Prediction Systems** – developing habitat suitability models for small pelagic fish in the northern Bay of Bengal, using machine learning and GIS. Key predictor variables include sea surface temperature, salinity, clarity, and current speed/direction.
4. **Policy and Legislation Review** – assessing existing national programs and policies, conducting socioeconomic surveys, and devising country-specific management plans.

Progress is already visible. Sampling has begun in all three countries, surveys are underway, and Myanmar partners have presented early findings on Hilsa migration and spawning in the Ayeyarwady River at an international conference. The unified database is in development, and predictive modelling is advancing with seasonal datasets.

Partners emphasized the uniqueness of this initiative. Dr. Amiya Sahoo (ICAR-CIFRI) noted that while India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar have worked in silos for decades, this project finally creates a platform for data exchange and joint research. He highlighted the importance of shared strategies for managing transboundary species like Hilsa. Dr. Md. Anisur Rahman (Bangladesh Agricultural University), with over three decades of experience in Hilsa research, expressed his excitement and commitment, assuring that Bangladesh's team is progressing well with sampling and database contributions.

The project aims not only to generate scientific knowledge but also to build successful management models. Bangladesh's incentive-based management of Hilsa has already shown promise, and similar approaches could be adapted for India and Myanmar. By integrating ecological, socioeconomic, and policy dimensions, the project seeks to deliver practical, country-specific strategies while fostering regional cooperation.

2.1.7. Split-site fellowships

Ms Afifat Khanam Ritika and Ms Phatcharee Roeknagandee, students from Bangladesh and Thailand respectively are pursuing doctoral and field studies in India. They expressed gratitude for the opportunity to engage with international experts and research institutions. Ritika mentioned that her stay in India had broadened her outlook and made her realize that the Bay of Bengal is more than Chittagong and Cox's Bazar. Ms Phatcharee has just started her work on eutrophication, water quality and marine pollution.

2.2. Expert and Policy Remarks

2.1.8. Dr. Cherdsak Virapat, Ex-DG, NACA & Ex-DG, CIRDAP

Dr. Virapat emphasized the need for integrated regional research strategies, stakeholder mapping, and the establishment of a Center of Excellence for marine research cooperation. Drawing on more than 25 years of experience in international cooperation, he highlighted both opportunities and challenges in building effective regional collaboration.

Emphasizing the importance of a clear vision and mission for regional cooperation, Dr Virapat said that for the Bay of Bengal, it was identified as achieving sustainable development, advancing the blue economy, and fostering a strong research network among BIMSTEC member states. Such a vision must be supported by a situation analysis, ideally conducted every five years, using SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) methodology to guide strategy.

Several key issues were outlined:

- **Overlapping mandates**: Many regional and international organizations are working on similar marine issues, often duplicating efforts. Coordination and resource-sharing are essential.
- **Integration across ministries**: Within countries, ministries and departments often work in silos with separate budgets and priorities. True integration remains difficult but necessary.
- **Identifying coordinators**: Effective cooperation requires clear leadership among governments, academic institutions, NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, and local communities.
- **Stakeholder mapping**: To strengthen cooperation, all relevant stakeholders—including universities, research institutes, private sector partners, and funding agencies—must be identified and engaged.
- **Funding and sustainability**: Beyond government budgets, support from CSR initiatives, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and UN agencies was recommended.
- **Global linkages**: UN organizations such as UNESCO, IOC, UNEP, UNDP, FAO, ESCAP, WMO, WHO, and the UN Ocean Mechanism are already engaged in marine issues. Their expertise and resources should be integrated into regional frameworks.
- **Centre of Excellence**: The establishment of a regional Centre of Excellence was proposed to maintain a database of experts, best practices, and achievements, serving as a hub for knowledge-sharing.
- **Strategic planning and KPIs**: Once a SWOT analysis is completed, an integrated strategic action plan should be developed with clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure progress and outcomes.

Dr Virapat also emphasized capacity building as a cornerstone of cooperation. Training programmes offered by the International Ocean Institute in Malta, Thailand, China, and Canada were cited as valuable opportunities for researchers to understand global frameworks such as UNCLOS and related instruments. Participation in such programs would strengthen both individual expertise and collective networks in the region.

2.1.9. Dr JK Jena, Deputy Director General (Fisheries), ICAR

Dr Jena expressed gratitude to the organizers for facilitating such a collaborative program and highlighted the importance of bringing together diverse institutions. He noted that the conclave had representation from 25 organizations, including government institutes, universities, and research centres across multiple countries.

Emphasizing that while many funding agencies exist, Dr Jena said that this particular platform has delivered significant dividends with relatively small investments. Its greatest strength lies in connecting researchers and institutions across borders, enabling the sharing of ideas and outputs. He suggested that each project should present its five most significant outputs in concise bullet points, along with lessons learned and challenges faced. This would help in overcoming obstacles and ensuring that issues are addressed in future projects. He observed that many projects have large budgets but limited scope for people-to-people movement. This

initiative, however, has enabled colleagues from multiple countries to meet in person. He stressed that while information is widely available today, personal interaction and handshakes make a difference that virtual meetings cannot replace.

Dr Jena urged that funding from the Ministry of External Affairs should be seen as an investment rather than expenditure, given the substantial outputs and opportunities generated through relatively small financial commitments. He praised Dr. Krishnan's dynamic leadership at BOBP-IGO, noting that despite limited resources, the organization has made its presence felt both nationally and internationally. He commended the ability to leverage opportunities and organize impactful events. He acknowledged the hurdles in project facilitation, including high travel costs and bureaucratic delays in processing files, regardless of project size. He stressed the need for greater support from the Ministry of External Affairs to ease these processes and enable more exchange visits. He concluded by affirming that even small projects can yield significant results if managed effectively, and urged continued strengthening of the platform for regional cooperation. Finally, he conveyed his thanks to CMFRI for providing the platform and extended best wishes to all partners and colleagues from neighbouring countries.

2.1.10. Amb CSR Ram, Jt. Secretary (BIMSTEC & SAARC), MEA, Govt. of India

Amb Ram began by expressing deep appreciation to all partners and contributors who have invested significant time, expertise, and commitment to the initiative. Emphasizing the high priority accorded to this work, the speaker offered sincere thanks to CMFRI, particularly Dr. Grinson George and his team, for organizing the BIMSTEC/ BIMReN biennial conference, which forms a key component of the ongoing project. Gratitude was also extended to Dr. Virapat for his guidance and presence, as well as to Dr. Jena, acknowledged as a longstanding mentor whose consistent involvement since the inception of the initiative has provided stability, insight, and reassurance.

Amb Ram highlighted the central role of Dr. Krishnan and BOBP-IGO, describing them as the "heart" and operational backbone of the initiative. Their commitment enabled the launch of the program, and their leadership continues to shape its direction. He emphasized that when partners thank BOBP-IGO, the appreciation resonates strongly with the wider team managing the initiative.

Providing a broader context, Amb Ram underscored the national significance of the initiative. It was announced by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India at the Colombo Summit in March 2022, and is regularly monitored by the Prime Minister's Office. This backing illustrates the value that national leadership places on regional research collaboration and collective problem-solving. The initiative aims to bring the research communities of the region together—something that has not been effectively achieved in the past—to address shared challenges and support evidence-based policymaking.

Reflecting on guidance from mentors, Amb Ram noted that India's scientific community has a history of developing collaborative solutions to regional challenges. The themes and activities identified by BOBP-IGO have been designed to address existing cooperation gaps among member countries. By working jointly, research teams are helping to connect and strengthen the region's scientific ecosystem. Although financial outlays may be modest, the collaborative dividends—enhanced engagement, cooperation, and shared understanding—are substantial.

The purpose of the mid-term biennial conference was framed as an opportunity to take stock of progress, assess outputs, and identify tangible recommendations emerging from the various

ongoing activities. These recommendations will ultimately feed into the policy discussions of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Groups. He encouraged researchers to view their work not as isolated technical tasks but as contributions to regional policymaking, generating knowledge and ideas that can support growth, sustainability, and long-term regional prosperity.

Participants were urged to remain engaged even after submitting project outputs—specifically, to follow up with BOBP-IGO regarding the uptake and application of their recommendations. The cumulative outcomes from these efforts are expected to form the basis for discussions at a future second biennial conference and will contribute to the decision on launching BIMReN 2.0. Amb Ram expressed confidence that, given the goodwill generated and the strong involvement of partners, the Government of India would support an expanded next phase with larger financial resources.

In closing, Amb Ram acknowledged the dedication of all involved—the researchers, BOBP-IGO, CMFRI, mentors, and technical teams. The initiative is seen as a rare opportunity to unite the region's scientific community and pave the way for broader marine cooperation beyond the current pilot phase. He noted that, as a career diplomat, he may be posted elsewhere in the future, but affirmed his continued commitment in spirit to the initiative's success. The remarks concluded with renewed thanks to all contributors and well-wishes for the successful continuation of activities leading into the next biennial conference and the transition from BIMReN 1.0 to BIMReN 2.0.

2.1.11. Additional Remarks: Dr Virapat

Dr Virapat requested a brief moment to share an idea inspired by the Ambassador's remarks. Drawing from past experience with the Cluster of Excellence (Hamburg) and the International Ocean Institute (IOI), he described a successful model of producing the World Ocean Review series—large, public-oriented publications created by over 200 scientists to raise awareness about global ocean issues. These publications covered topics such as climate impacts, ocean chemistry, fisheries, marine pollution, marine minerals, maritime trade, marine biodiversity, and the Law of the Sea, and were widely accessible as free PDFs.

He proposed applying a similar model to the Bay of Bengal and the BIMSTEC region, aligned with the vision of sustainable development and the blue economy. With a scientific network of more than 200 researchers in the region, experts could be organized to draft chapters on different themes—assessing the current situation and outlining future pathways for sustainability—thereby helping the public understand key issues and priorities.

Dr Virapat noted that such an initiative would take time and requires modest financial support from BIMSTEC, but would be valuable to governments, including India, by offering a clear, research-based view of ocean and blue economy challenges and opportunities. This effort would also represent the first large-scale regional research network publication of its kind.

2.1.12. Conclusion: Dr P. Krishnan, Director, BOBP IGO

Dr P. Krishnan expressed deep gratitude to key contributors, especially Dr. Jena and Amb Ram, whose leadership and encouragement helped transform initial ideas into a fully developed initiative. The speaker also thanked CMFRI and acknowledged that being in CMFRI is a feeling at home due to their strong support.

Emphasizing that the success of the program is rooted in the enthusiasm and commitment of all partners, the speaker noted that although the project has a modest budget, researchers—many

of whom manage far larger projects—have shown exceptional dedication to regional cooperation. At BOBP-IGO, the project was not just reviewed but co-developed, with guidance from a strong task force and multiple mentors who supported development, review, and implementation.

Motivated by the positive momentum, Dr Krishnan announced a new commitment: by MECOS 5, a Regional Award for Championing Regional Cooperation will be formally established, with approval to be sought from the Governing Council. Awardees may be invited to future council meetings, with travel support provided even after project closure. He encouraged all researchers to continue building connections beyond project requirements—including linking students and institutions—so that the network grows organically.

In closing, Dr Krishnan requested Amb Ram that before his tenure ends, he considers advancing the idea of establishing a BIMReN Technology Centre for Marine Science, ideally hosted at CMFRI. Such a centre, he noted, would play a transformative role in strengthening marine science capacity in the region, given the difficulty of replicating ocean research infrastructure elsewhere and the strong global reputation of CMFRI. He expressed hope that the Ambassador would later return to inaugurate the centre.

Welcome to the

BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network (BIMReN)

First Regional Partners Conclave &

Launch of BIMREN 2.0

04 Nov 2025 | 12 30 – 14 30 hours

ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research institute (CMFRI), Kochi

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