REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION IN ASIA-PACIFIC: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES WITHIN BIMSTEC

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General Overview on Regional Cooperation in Education

Part I

Regional Cooperation in Education

- "Educational Cooperation in the broadest sense occurs whenever two or more parties work together to achieve an educational objective." In international education cooperation, the objective may vary from having exchange programme or having a purchaser-provider relationship (trade in educational services) or, donor-recepient relationship or, Cross-National Harmonization

  - McKenzie, et al (2008), ADB Study (2012)

Regional Cooperation in Education in Asia

- Cold War Era- collaborations/exchanges/cooperation between Asian Universities/Institutes/Governments and Non-Asian (particularly US/UK) Universities/Institutes/Governments

- Post Cold War Era: Intra-Regional Collaboration/Cooperation within Asia

Standard Objectives of Regional/Cross-Border Educational Cooperation

- Revenue generation
- Improving Instructional Quality
- Offer Wider Curricula to Students/Researchers
- Enhance Institutional Prestige
- Greater Access to Resources/Libraries/Literature not Available within one Campus
- Expand Student/Teacher/Researcher Mobility
- Obtain International Standard of Education/Research

Cross-National Harmonization

ADB Study, 2012 suggests,

Cross-National Harmonization is about Following Same Curricula, Admission Criterion, Academic Degree Standards etc.- Objective is to increase cross-national and cross-institutional student-teacher mobility- one example is ASEAN University Network

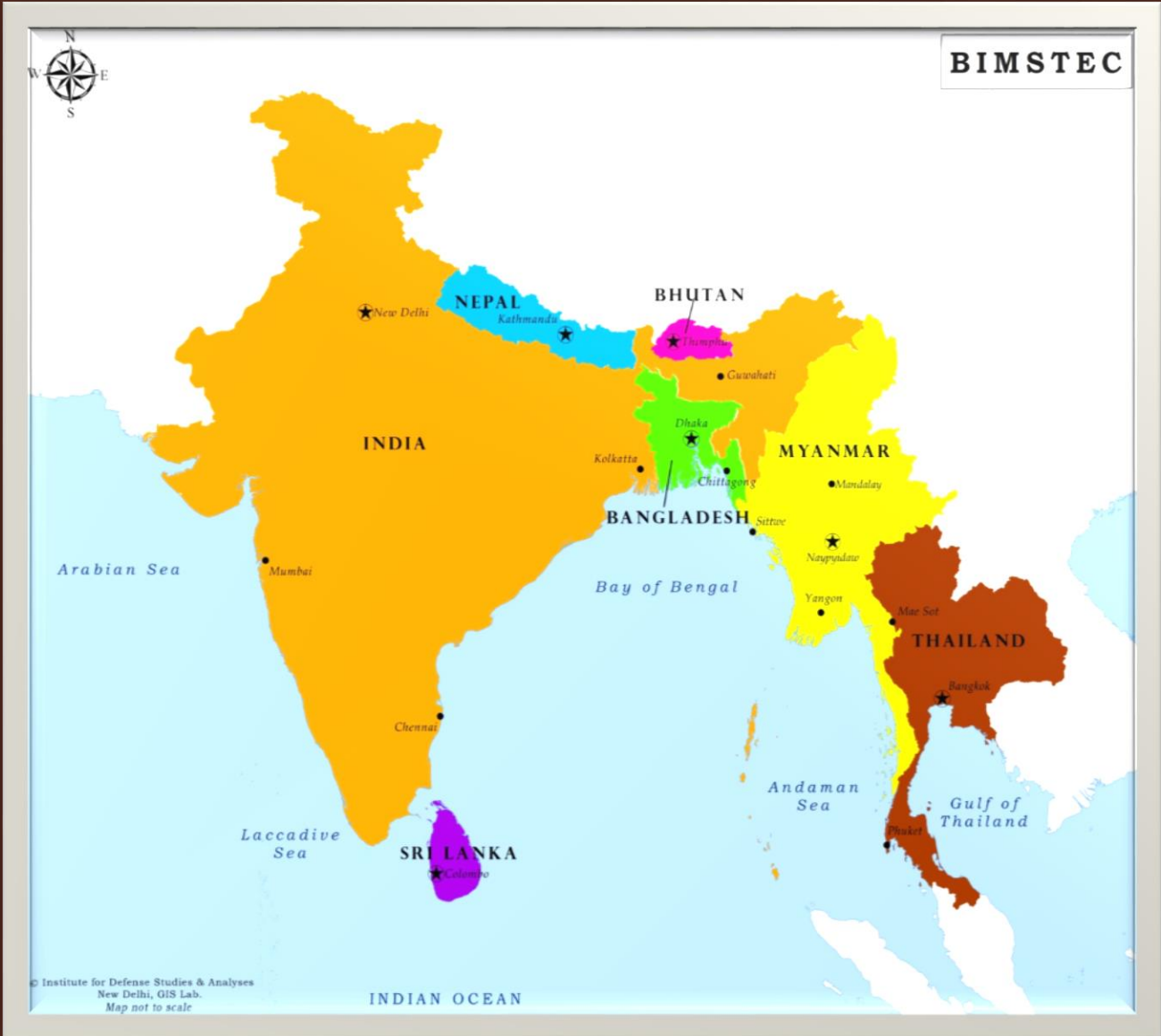# Problems in Regional Education Cooperation (in South/ Southeast Asia)

- Socio-economic background in Countries are different and therefore, the standards of higher education are different and so are the socio-economic requirements from its education system (Example- Singapore –Myanmar)

- Language Barriers (English is the standard and common language for higher education in most of South and Southeast Asia- but English proficiency obtained through primary level education in all these countries are not similar- for instance, many government schools in West Bengal, India still use Bengali as their medium of instruction- this is true for other South Asian countries as well)

Problems in Cross-National Harmonization

- University Networks Require a Champion University to Advance its Goals- but, there are chances that other universities in the Network can get dominated by that Champion University (ADB Study, 2012)
- Lack of Transparency in Decision Making Process
- Lack of Unified Institutional Procedures in the Member Universities
- Lack of Funding

BIMSTEC and Education Cooperation

Part II

Few Basic Information on Higher Education System in BIMSTEC (Primarily South Asia)

Student enrollment in Higher Education Jumped from 12.2 million in 2000 to 21.0 million in 2009, representing an annual expansion rate of 7%. The average gross enrolment ratio (GER) in tertiary education increased from 4% in 1980 to 13% in 2009. it may increase till 56% in the coming years. (ADB 2014)

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- Private higher education accounts for 28% enrollments in South Asia and 35% in East Asia.

- In South Asia, only 2% of the total higher education enrolled students have PhDs, compared to 5% in the North America or Europe.

- Within BIMSTEC, lower-income group students' enrollment in higher education is very low- a phenomenon seen in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh

Contd..

- In South Asia, female participation rate in higher education is 41%,in East Asia, it is 57%. Sri Lanka has a higher female participation in higher education in South Asia.

- Only 1.2% upper secondary school children in South Asia receive vocational training- in BIMSTEC, very little money is spent on technical and vocational training

Contd..

- E-learning is limited in South Asia for poor access to internet, lack of infrastructure and poor broadband facilities

(Source: ADB 2014)

Major Concerns in Higher Education in BIMSTEC

Concerns...

- More than 37% of the Population is Youth- How many of them are Graduating? If they are Graduating and Going Beyond, what is the OUTCOME of this Higher Education?

- QUALITY AND RELEVANCE OF THE EXISTING HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Concerns...

- Lack of Flexibility, Mobility, Innovation, Research?

- ARE WE READY TO TAKE UP CHALLENGES AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL?

Concerns...

- Privately Run Higher Education Institutions – Profit-Making and Not Maintaining Quality Standards?

- Finding Adequate and Good-Quality Faculty is a Challenge

Prospects for Education Cooperation within BIMSTEC

BIMSTEC: A State Driven Regional Mechanism

People-to-people exchange and Economic Cooperation

India and Education Cooperation in BIMSTEC

- Statement on Intent; MoUs between Universities and Institutes; Scholarships (e.g. ITEC; TCS of Colombo Plan); Financial Assistance in Setting up Education Centers, Funding Sanskrit and Buddhist Education across the Region; Running IT and Vocational Training Institutes; English Training Schools etc.
- Cooperation under SAARC framework
- Nalanda University

Recommendations

1. Create more Awareness on Existing Educational Cooperation Programmes- Scholarships, Fellowships, MoUs etc.

2. Ensure Access to Soft Infrastructure- (Increasing Use of Internet, E-Library, Free Access to Data etc.)

3. Easy and Seamless Physical Connectivity- More Direct Flights Connecting Cities; More Rail and Roadways; Common Academics Visa both for Students and faculties

4. Making the Curricula Globally Relevant- Maintaining a Minimum Standard

5. Raising Funds through Popular Involvements

6. Keeping Educational Cooperation Away from Political Contentions between member Countries

7. Set Up an Education Forum within BIMSTEC to Discuss about Best Practices Available as well as Sharing Information

8. Access to Career Related Information and Develop Skill Analysis Programmes

Thank You