

Joint Statement of the Ninth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting

09/08/2006

The Ninth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was held in New Delhi, India on 9 August, 2006.

The meeting was attended by H.E. Mr. M. Morshed Khan, MP, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, H.E. Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bhutan, H.E. Mr. E. Ahamed, Minister of State for External Affairs of the Republic of India, H.E. Mr. U. Nyan Win, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Union of Myanmar, H.E. Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat, Finance Minister of Nepal, H.E. Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and H.E. Dr. Kantathi Suphamongkhon, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand.

H.E. Mr. E. Ahamed, Minister of State for External Affairs of India was elected Chairman by acclamation upon the proposal of the outgoing Chairman H.E. Mr. M. Morshed Khan, MP, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh.

The meeting approved the Report of the Eleventh meeting of the Senior Officials held on 8 August, 2006 preceding the Ministerial Meeting. The Meeting also heard Statements by the Leaders of all the Delegations.

At the conclusion of the Meeting the Heads of Delegation issued the following Joint Statement:

We, the Heads of Delegation of the Ninth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, having gathered in New Delhi on 9th August, 2006 reiterated our commitment to the founding objectives and principles of BIMSTEC to accelerate economic and social growth in the region and noted with satisfaction the progress made since we last met.

We agreed to enhance cooperation in the following areas:

Trade and Investment

Affirming the importance of the Free Trade Area which will increase trade and investment, enhance competitiveness and promote socio-economic development, we urged that the negotiations on trade in goods under the FTA be concluded before the next Summit. We welcomed the outcome of the meeting of the Trade Negotiating Committee held in Colombo in July 2006. We underlined the importance of regular Senior Trade/Economic Officials Meetings as well as the meetings of the Trade/Economic Ministers. We suggested that consideration be given to the early convening of the next round of these meetings. We also emphasized the importance of an early decision on the recommendations of the Task Force that has been mandated to examine the restructuring of the trade and investment sector.

We noted with satisfaction the meeting in Nepal of the Expert Group on the BIMSTEC Business Travel Card and agreed to further consider measures to facilitate business travel in the BIMSTEC region.

Transport and Communication

Recognizing that different modes of transport linkages are imperative for achieving connectivity amongst member countries to promote the movement of goods and people, we took note of the study to be conducted by ADB on BIMSTEC transport infrastructure and logistics. In this context, we underlined the need for ADB to work closely with governments of BIMSTEC member countries. We noted the various activities initiated in this sector, including capacity building through training programmes. We emphasized the need for more vigorous efforts for cooperation in the area of infrastructure including communication and port linkages.

Tourism

To enhance tourism in the region we underlined the need to move forward with a concrete Plan of Action based on decisions arrived at by the First Round Table and Workshop of Tourism Ministers and Travel and Tourism Industry Representatives held in Kolkata in February 2005, including establishment of a BIMSTEC Tourism Information Centre and BIMSTEC Tourism Fund. The Second Round Table and Workshop to be held in Nepal in August 2006 would review the progress made in this sector and provide impetus to our cooperation.

We also agreed that tourism should be promoted both within and from outside the region and that a concept of combined BIMSTEC destinations should be developed.

Energy Cooperation

We welcomed the decision to establish the BIMSTEC Energy Centre in India that would act as a focal point for strengthening cooperation in the energy sector through sharing of experience and capacity building. We agreed to intensify our cooperation so that tangible outcomes can be achieved by the 2nd BIMSTEC Summit.

We emphasized the importance of sharing experiences and strengthening cooperation amongst member countries in the fields of grid connectivity, gas pipelines, hydro power, renewable sources of energy, energy efficiency, access to energy in all areas and energy sector reforms, restructuring, regulations and best practices.

Technology

We underlined the need to enhance cooperation in advanced areas of fundamental scientific research. We agreed that exchange of expertise in software and hardware development, as well as joint R&D in this field should be further promoted. We also encourage technology transfer and exchange of experience and data on Geographical Information System (GIS).

We welcomed the proposal to set up a Technology Transfer Exchange Facility. It was agreed that a concept paper would be circulated among member countries prior to an Experts Group Meeting.

Fisheries

We reiterated our commitment to step up our cooperation, including with our private sectors, to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources through effective conservation and management of the resources in the Bay of Bengal in accordance with international law.

We welcomed Thailand's offer to organize a workshop on Fisheries Cooperation in BIMSTEC in late 2006 to discuss the direction of future cooperation in this sector as well as details of the proposed joint survey under the Ecosystem-based Fisheries Management in the Bay of Bengal project.

Poverty Alleviation

We welcomed Nepal's offer to be the Lead country for Poverty Alleviation and also Bangladesh's offer to host the First Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation.

We welcomed Thailand's offer to share its experiences in combating poverty through various domestic policies based, in particular, on the philosophy of "Sufficiency Economy" which has proven to be a successful model for sustainable alternative development in Thailand.

Culture

We welcomed and accepted the offer of Bhutan to be the lead country. We welcomed the Paro Initiative and the Plan of Action adopted at the First BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Culture. We also welcomed the proposal for the establishment of BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission and Observatory in Bhutan and directed that this be considered expeditiously at the expert level. We welcomed the offer of India to host the first meeting of the Expert Group to study this proposal.

We welcomed the offer of Bangladesh to host the Second Ministerial Meeting on Culture and the BIMSTEC Cultural Festival in April 2007.

Agriculture

We welcomed and accepted the offer of Myanmar to be the lead country. We look forward to identification of cooperative activities in Agriculture Sector. We welcomed Thailand's initiative to host a workshop on Agricultural cooperation in BIMSTEC in August 2006, which would provide an opportunity for the members to define the scope and direction of their cooperation.

We agreed to cooperate in R&D in alternative energy crops so as to promote cost effective bio-fuel production at the community level.

Counter-Terrorism & Trans National Crimes

We emphasized the importance of the work done by the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism & Trans National Crimes including the work of the sub groups under the Joint Working Group in the areas of combating the financing of terrorism, intelligence sharing, legal and law enforcement issues and prevention of drug trafficking, and encouraged the Joint Working Group to continue its active work that could lead to reaching concrete areas of agreement and cooperation in this important sector. We approved the report of the 2nd meeting of the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and Trans National Crimes held in New Delhi on 4-5 May 2006, and welcomed that the 3rd meeting of the Joint Working Group would take place in Myanmar in December 2006.

Environment & Disaster Management

We welcomed and accepted India's offer to be the lead country. We appreciated the progress under the sector including the decision to establish the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate and various training programmes and workshops in the area of remote sensing for environment and disaster management applications.

The establishment of the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate would be an important milestone towards improving weather observation and prediction techniques, with the intent of reducing the loss of lives and property, caused by weather and climate related natural disasters in the BIMSTEC region. We advised our officials to finalize modalities for the Centre before the 2nd BIMSTEC Summit.

We agreed to strengthen our emergency preparedness for natural disasters, especially through early warning systems. To this effect, we encourage networking between the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate and other existing regional institutions, such as the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) and the SAARC Meteorological Research Centre.

We welcomed the offer of India to organize a workshop on cooperation in the area of remote sensing for environment and disaster management applications.

Public Health

We welcomed and accepted the offer of Thailand to be the Lead country and welcomed Thailand's offer to host a meeting on traditional medicines.

We agreed that intensified cooperation in this sector should also include prevention and control of infectious diseases, such as avian influenza, HIV/AIDS, polio, kala azar, malaria, TB and dengue fever. We noted with appreciation the scholarships offered by India in traditional systems of medicine and by Thailand for training programmes in public health.

People to People Contacts

We welcomed the offer of Thailand to be the lead country and the initiatives taken by Thailand in promoting people to people contacts, including its plans to organize for member countries a visit to Royal projects in northern Thailand. We underlined the need for all member countries to identify and initiate activities in this sector.

We welcomed India's offer to organize the First BIMSTEC Film Festival.

BIMSTEC Website

We noted that work had been initiated for the maintenance of the Website by the National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka and the uploading of suitable material under the supervision of BWG.

We agreed that a monthly newsletter would be published on the BIMSTEC website by the BWG. We welcomed Sri Lanka's offer to explore the possibility of developing an intra-BIMSTEC network accessible only to authorized

officials.

BIMSTEC Secretariat

We reiterated the need to establish a permanent BIMSTEC Secretariat and appreciated the work done by the First Inter-Governmental Experts Group Meeting and directed that the Experts Group further deliberate on the issue and submit, through the SOM, concrete recommendations to the Tenth Ministerial Meeting. We also appreciated the work of the BIMSTEC Centre in providing support for BIMSTEC activities through the BWG, as an interim arrangement pending the establishment of a permanent Secretariat. We also thanked Thailand for its continued financial support for the BIMSTEC Centre until June 2007.

Second BIMSTEC Summit

We noted with satisfaction BIMSTEC's achievements thus far and reaffirmed our commitment to further strengthening our partnership within the BIMSTEC framework. We expressed confidence that the Second BIMSTEC Summit to be hosted by India and proposed to be held on February 8, 2007 would carry forward our cooperative endeavours with renewed energy. The Second BIMSTEC Summit would commemorate the 10th anniversary year of the establishment of BIMSTEC and would provide an opportunity for our leaders to assess and review the progress made. Deliberations at the Summit would provide guidance on the future direction of cooperation and assist in shaping the vision for BIMSTEC to enable the region to achieve its full potential.

10th Ministerial Meeting

The 10th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting will be held in India.

**New Delhi
August 9, 2006**