

Second BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture
10 November 2022
New Delhi, India (Virtual)

Remarks by the Secretary General of BIMSTEC

- Your Excellency Shri Narendra Singh Tomar, Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, Government of India
- Your Excellencies - the Honourable Agriculture Ministers
- Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and privilege for me to have the opportunity to address the second BIMSTEC Agricultural Ministerial Meeting. **Excellencies**, the detailed Report of the Secretary General containing progress, decisions and limitations since the first Agricultural Ministers Meeting held on 12 July 2019 has been circulated amongst the Members States, and therefore I will be brief in my oral presentation.

Hon'ble Ministers, Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates

The first BIMSTEC Agricultural Ministers Meeting was held in August 2019 in Nay Pyi Taw in Myanmar. We are happy that the second Agriculture Ministerial meeting is taking place today after a gap of three years - as we have some decisions to be taken - and some important documents to be finalized and adopted. The Agriculture Senior Officials Meeting that concluded yesterday has finalized a Joint Statement of the second Agriculture Ministerial Meeting which will make a significant difference in taking the BIMSTEC Agriculture Cooperation forward. For this, I would like to take the opportunity to extend my sincere appreciation to the Government of India, especially the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare of India for hosting this 2nd BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting and the 2nd BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture.

I would also like to place my sincere gratitude to Your Excellencies, from the other BIMSTEC Member States for their kind participation in this very important Meeting - and to Myanmar for taking lead in this sector and bringing agriculture cooperation this far.

Mr. Chairman and Excellencies,

Given the important role of agriculture in the livelihood of the people of the all seven BIMSTEC Member States, Agriculture was included in 2005 as one of the core areas of BIMSTEC

Cooperation. Since then, the sector has been one of the most active sectors of BIMSTEC cooperation.

However, like rest of the world, we also faced unprecedented challenges in the last two years after Covid-19 set in early 2020. The people of all seven Member States became victims of the pandemic which has taken a heavy toll on the health systems, economies and societies of all countries. The pandemic lockdowns and restrictions have severely impaired our pace of events and many BIMSTEC Agricultural meetings and workshops had to be stalled.

Nonetheless, despite challenges, our Member States have kept the BIMSTEC commitment and momentum and managed to undertake some important meetings and activities in the last 3 difficult years.

The Expert Groups on Agricultural Cooperation which is the core body of BIMSTEC Agriculture Cooperation has been meeting almost regularly. India hosted the Eighth Meeting of the Expert Groups on Agricultural Cooperation on 31 August 2021 and Myanmar hosted the Ninth Meeting of the Expert Groups on Agricultural Cooperation on 08 September 2022.

During these three years, several workshops were also conducted under the Common Projects.

- The Third BIMSTEC Workshop on Good Agricultural Practices was held in Myanmar in December 2021;
- The BIMSTEC Workshop on Encouraging Private Sector Participation on Cold Chain Management for Agricultural Products was hosted by Thailand in June 2022;
- The BIMSTEC Workshop on Developing Value Chain through Post Harvest Management was hosted by Sri Lanka in August 2022;
- And the BIMSTEC Workshop on Encouraging Private Sector Participation on Developing Value Chains was hosted by Bhutan in October 2022.

Let me also take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to the Government of India for offering BIMSTEC Scholarship in Agriculture, which indeed is a great initiative for promotion of Agricultural cooperation in the region.

Mr. Chairman,

To take forward the BIMSTEC Agricultural Cooperation - and as instructed by the Leaders at the Fifth BIMSTEC Summit this year, the Secretariat, in consultation with the Lead Country

Myanmar has developed *the draft Plan of Action on Strengthening BIMSTEC Agricultural Cooperation*.

The Plan of Action charts out BIMSTEC agricultural cooperation for the next five years, from 2023 to 2027. It has also identified 17 actions in 5 areas of cooperation with the objective to ensure food security, food safety and better nutrition, reduce rural poverty and increase resilience to climate change.

The Plan of Action was discussed in detail by the 9th Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Agriculture and approved by the Senior Officials Meeting yesterday. We look forward to adopting the *Plan of Action on Strengthening BIMSTEC Agricultural Cooperation* by the Ministerial Meeting today.

Excellencies,

Financing the common agricultural projects has been an important issue and constraint - that was repeatedly discussed in many expert group meetings. While some Member States have been using their own resources to host workshops and seminars, some common agricultural projects could not be implemented due to lack of funding.

Therefore, as directed by 17th Ministerial Meeting to explore partnership with appropriate regional or international organizations, International Food Policy and Research Institute (IFPRI) has offered to partner with BIMSTEC to promote Agriculture & Food Security in the BIMSTEC region.

Therefore, in order to promote and expedite the common agriculture projects and programs, BIMSTEC and IFPRI has agreed to develop a Memorandum of Understanding.

We are happy to report that, after discussion with the Member States and Expert Group Meetings, the Draft MOU has been approved by the Senior Officials Meeting yesterday and we look forward to get it endorsed by the Ministerial Meeting today.

To conclude, I would like to once again thank Mr. Chairman, Excellencies and the Delegates for your presence here today. As a Secretariat, we assure our full support and commitment to all Member States to further advance cooperation in the BIMSTEC Agriculture Sector.

Thank you
