

SIXTH BIMST-EC SENIOR OFFICIALS' MEETING

REPORT OF THE SIXTH BIMST-EC SENIOR OFFICIALS' MEETING (BANGKOK, 17-19 SEPTEMBER 2003)

The Sixth BIMST-EC Senior Officials' Meeting was held from 17-19 September 2003 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Delegates from Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand attended the Meeting. The list of delegates appears as Annex 1.

Agenda Item 1: Election of Chairman

The Meeting elected, by acclamation, the leader of the Thai delegation Mr. Tej Bunnag, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, as Chairman. Sri Lanka handed over the Chairmanship of the Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) thereafter to Thailand. The opening remarks made by Mr. Tej Bunnag appear as Annex 2.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda adopted by the Meeting appears as Annex 3.

Agenda Item 3: Business Arrangements

The Meeting was held in plenary.

Agenda Item 4: Report of the Chairman of the BIMST-EC Working Group

A report on the BIMST-EC Working Group Meetings held in Bangkok was presented by H.E. Ambassador Hewa S. Palihakkara, Chairman of the Working Group since the Fifth BIMST-EC Ministerial Meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka in December 2002. The Meeting expressed its appreciation to Ambassador Palihakkara for his chairmanship over the past 9 months and took note of the report with appreciation. A copy of the Report appears as Annex 4.

Dr. David Oldfield, consultant to ESCAP, introduced the study "Towards Setting Up a BIMST-EC Technical Support Facility and Permanent Secretariat." A copy of the study appears as Annex 5.

The Meeting took note of the report with appreciation, and exchanged views on the need and various ways to set up a Technical Support Facility. The Meeting instructed the Working Group to consider the presentation, and follow up on comments made by Senior Officials. The issue will be considered further at the next SOM in February 2004.

Agenda Item 5: Follow-up results of the 5th BIMST-EC Ministerial Meeting

5.1 Report of Lead Countries on progress in each sector of cooperation

The lead countries presented the following progress report on their respective areas of responsibility. The reports appear as the following Annexes.

- Bangladesh: Trade and Investment Sector (Annex 6)
- India: Transport and Communication Sector, and Tourism Sector (Annex 7 and 8)
- Myanmar: Energy Sector (Annex 9)
- Sri Lanka: Technology Sector (Annex 10); Processed Food and Gem and Jewelry Sub-sector (Annex 11)
- Thailand: Fisheries Sector (Annex 12);

The Meeting welcomed the document on priority projects (Annex 13) introduced by the Chairman of the Bangkok Working Group (BWG), the document on projects in the respective sectors prepared by ESCAP, and information papers prepared by delegations, which appear as Annex 14.

The Meeting reaffirmed the 4 areas of priority identified by the 5th Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Colombo. The SOM urged the streamlining of the projects through a template to be introduced by Thailand intersessionally. The template would be used to guide the sharing of information by lead agencies with the BWG. The SOM instructed the Bangkok Working Group to compile and circulate details of each country's short-listed projects so that they may be submitted to the respective line ministries of each member country for consideration. The BWG would then compile the projects into a compendium and submit them to the next SOM for consideration.

Thailand introduced a paper prepared by the International Institute for Trade and Development (ITD), which appears as Annex 15, proposing a workshop on rules of origin, to be held the 4th week of November 2003, a joint research programme with research institutions in other BIMST-EC countries, and the availability of the ITD's conference facilities for use by BIMST-EC countries.

5.2 Report of Group of Experts on FTA

The Meeting took note of Sri Lanka's report on the work of the Group of Experts on FTA and the ESCAP study. The report appears as Annex 16.

The Meeting requested the Chair of the Group of Experts on FTA to ask ESCAP to provide specific recommendations on how to extend special and differential treatment to least developed countries (LDCs). The study should also cover other areas of liberalization such as investment and services.

The Meeting noted the holding of the meeting of the Group of Experts on FTA in Myanmar during 20-22 October 2003.

5.3 Report on “Visit BIMST-EC 2004”

The Meeting noted the preparations for the “Visit BIMST-EC Year 2004” and requested all members to urgently provide their inputs/approval for the various activities to the chair country India. The Meeting also noted Thailand’s proposal to organize the first BIMST-EC Youth Football Tournament 2004 to coincide with the Summit Meeting, and agreed to refer Thailand’s information paper on the football tournament (Annex 17) to relevant agencies for further coordination with Thailand.

5.4 Report on Criteria of Membership

The Meeting discussed and exchanged views on the geographical criteria for BIMST-EC membership. The Meeting instructed the Bangkok Working Group to continue consultations, taking into consideration the views expressed by the SOM.

The Meeting agreed to recommend to the Ministerial Meeting the accession of Bhutan and Nepal to BIMST-EC.

5.5 Rotation of BIMST-EC Chairmanship

The Meeting agreed that, beginning with this Meeting, the chairmanship of SOM and BWG would be handed over at the Intersessional SOM, which is held in September each year, so that the chairman of the SOM and BWG can prepare work for, and follow up the results of, the Ministerial Meetings and the Summits.

The chairmanship of the Ministerial Meetings and the Summits will subsequently be handed over to the country chairing the SOM. For the first Summit in February 2004, Sri Lanka as incumbent Chair will open the meeting and hand over the Chairmanship to Thailand as agreed at the Working Group, and the Senior Officials consultations at the SOM.

5.6 Future Direction of BIMST-EC

The Meeting took note of Thailand’s working paper on the future direction of BIMST-EC, which appears as Annex 18.

The Meeting exchanged views on the future direction of BIMST-EC, and instructed the BWG to continue deliberations on this issue, taking into consideration the views expressed by SOM. Senior officials will revisit the issue at the next SOM and submit their recommendations to the Ministerial Meeting for further consideration.

Agenda Item 6: Preparation for BIMST-EC SOM/STEOM/Ministerial Meetings and Summit

6.1 Date and Venue/Programme/Logistical Arrangements

The Meeting welcomed the offer by Thailand to host the 7th Senior Officials’ Meeting, the 6th Ministerial Meeting, and the first Summit Meeting during 6-9 February 2004 in Phuket and took note of the tentative programme.

The Trade/Economic Ministers Meeting will be held on a date to be determined, after the GOE Meeting in January and before the Summit. The Meeting suggested to Thailand that the audience with H.M. the King should be held on 9 February and requested Thailand to provide information on administrative arrangements as soon as possible.

The Meeting agreed to submit the programme for further consideration by the Ministers.

The tentative programme of the three Meetings appears as Annex 19.

6.2 Preparation for Business Forum

The Meeting took note of an information paper by Thailand's Chamber of Commerce on the draft agenda for the 6th Business Forum Meeting to be held in Bangkok on 2 February 2004, and agreed to convey the paper to their respective chambers of commerce. The agenda appears as Annex 20.

6.3 Possible Elements in the draft Summit Declaration

The Meeting noted Thailand's working paper on the possible elements to be included in the draft Summit Declaration, which appears as Annex 21. Thailand will submit a first draft of the Summit Declaration based on the said paper and the comments made by SOM to the BWG for further consideration.

The Meeting noted the draft agenda for the Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Summit, which will reflect the SOM's discussions.

Agenda Item 7: Other Matters

The Meeting instructed the BWG to develop a paper on fostering people-to-people contact through, for example, interaction with the academic and media sectors to encourage greater awareness of BIMST-EC.

Agenda Item 8: Consideration and Adoption of the Report of the Senior Officials' Meeting

The Meeting adopted the report of the Sixth BIMST-EC Senior Officials' Meeting.