



**SENIOR OFFICIALS' MEETING
Tenth Session
18 December, DHAKA ,2005**

BIMSTEC/SOM.10/16

THE REPORT

I. Opening of the Meeting

1. The Tenth BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 18 December 2005. Delegates from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand attended the Meeting. The list of participants is at **Annex I**.
2. The Tenth BIMSTEC SOM was chaired by His Excellency Mr. Hemayetuddin, Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh. The text of his opening remarks is at **Annex II**.

II. Adoption of the Agenda

3. The Agenda as adopted by the Meeting is at **Annex-III**.

III Report of the Chairman of the BIMSTEC Working Group (BWG)

4. The Report on the BIMSTEC Working Group Meetings (BWG) held in Bangkok since the Ninth SOM (Dhaka, 31 May – 1 June 2005) was presented by the Chair of the Group, H.E. Mr. Shahed Akhtar, Ambassador of Bangladesh to Thailand. The report is contained in doc. **BIMSTEC/SOM.10/2**
5. The Meeting noted with appreciation, the Report on the work of the BWG since the Ninth SOM. The SOM commended the BWG for its valuable coordinating role in furthering the work of the BIMSTEC and expressed appreciation for the support provided by Thailand.

IV. Report of the Lead Countries on six priority sectors

6. The Lead Countries presented progress reports on the Sectoral activities under respective areas, which are as follows:

Sectors

- a. Trade and Investment Sector
- TNC
- b. Transport and Communication Sectors
- c. Tourism Sector

- d. Energy Sector
- e. Technology Sector
- f. Agricultural & Fisheries Sector

Trade and Investment Sector

7. The SOM noted with appreciation the Report of the Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) on the progress in the negotiations on the issues in the Text of the Agreement on Trade in Goods. It expressed the hope that the Agreement would be finalized at the Tenth Meeting of the TNC (Kathmandu, 21-27 December 2005) and would be signed at the next meeting of the Trade/Economic Ministers to be hosted by Bangladesh, so that the Agreement could enter into force, as agreed, from 1 July 2006.

8. It further noted that the TNC would commence its work on the remaining two Agreements on Trade in Services and on Investment at the Tenth Meeting of the TNC (Kathmandu, 21-27 December 2005).

9. In order to implement the Agreement on Trade in Goods on the fast track the SOM considered the following:

- Measures to remove non-tariff barriers;
- Trade facilitation measures, including standards, measurements, quality control and Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs); and
- The question of avoidance of Double Taxation

Transport and Communication Sector

10. The SOM took note of progress in the Transport and Communication sector since the Ninth SOM. It also noted the feasibility studies on major surface routes and border crossings, inland waterways, integration of rail networks and short-sea shipping undertaken by member countries. The SOM recommended early elaboration and implementation of regional/sub-regional projects for enhancing connectivity among BIMSTEC member states.

Tourism Sector

11. The SOM recalled the outcome of the First Roundtable and Workshop of the BIMSTEC Tourism Ministers (Kolkata, February 2005) and adoption of a Declaration and Proposed Plan of Action. It called for effective implementation of the above through specific joint programmes and projects.

12. The Meeting welcomed the offer made by Nepal to host the Second Roundtable and Workshop of BIMSTEC Tourism Ministers in Nepal in 2006. It also requested Nepal to submit details of its intention to be the Chair Country of 'adventure and Eco-Tourism' sub-sector and decided that the BWG would make recommendations upon examination of the request.

13. It urged members to provide updated information regarding activities undertaken in this regard. The meeting expressed concern at delayed receipt of information from member states and emphasized that information should be provided periodically and public information would be posted on BIMSTEC website.

Energy Sector

14. The SOM reviewed the progress made in the Energy sector since its Ninth SOM. It welcomed the outcome of the First BIMSTEC Ministerial Conference (New, Delhi, 4 October 2005) and underlined the need for follow-up of implementation of the agreed plan of Action of the Conference, including those relating to Task Forces on BIMSTEC Trans-Power Exchange and Development, Trans-BIMSTEC Gas Pipeline (s) and Renewable Energy.

15. It welcomed the offers made by member states for hosting various meetings/workshop listed at **Annex IV**.

Technology Sector

16. The SOM recommended further follow-up of the outcome of the Expert Group Meeting held in Sri Lanka in 2002, especially exploring project cooperation in agro-based technologies, food processing, herbal products, bio-technology and ICT.

17. The SOM welcomed the offer of India to host a Meeting in New Delhi on 17-18 January 2006 to consider matters relating to the governing structure, financing and staffing of the proposed BIMSTEC Centre on Weather and Climate.

Agriculture and Fisheries Sector

18. The Meeting noted the importance of sustaining the aquatic resources and their management in the Bay of Bengal. It noted with appreciation holding of the Experts' Group Meeting under this sector since the Ninth SOM. It called for early finalization of the three projects proposed by member states in the Technical Meeting (Bangkok, 5-7 September 2005): (i) Ecosystem-based Fishery Management in the Bay of Bengal (Thailand), (ii) Study on Impact of Offshore Oil and Gas Drilling on the Marine Fisheries Resource in Bay of Bengal (Bangladesh), and (iii) Marine Fisheries Stock Assessment, Management and Development of New Fisheries in Bay of Bengal (Bangladesh).

19. The SOM took note to interest of Nepal to be the Chair Country for sub-sector on inland fisheries.

20. The Meeting welcomed Thailand's offer to organize a workshop on agriculture and fisheries cooperation in 2006.

V. Follow-up of the First BIMSTEC Summit

21. The SOM reviewed the progress of follow-up of decisions taken by the BIMSTEC leaders at the First BIMSTEC Summit held in Bangkok on 31 July 2004. A table of such actions is contained in **Annex-V**.

People-to-People Contact

22. The SOM recalled that the First BIMSTEC Summit decided to increase interaction among peoples of the member states through various programmes of exchanges and interactions. It noted briefings by member states about initiatives taken by their governments and the activities planned for 2006 to promote people-to-people contact.

23. It noted with satisfaction various programmes of exchange undertaken by the member states to enhance people-to-people contact, including the visit of the Indian Parliamentarians and projects organized by Thailand, such as the BIMSTEC Young Ambassadors' Programme, BIMSTEC Exhibition and 'Getting to Know the New BIMSTEC Members'.

24. The SOM agreed to recommend the proposal on observance of 6 June as the 'BIMSTEC Day' in commemoration of the adoption of the Bangkok Declaration establishing the Grouping. The SOM recalled its earlier recommendation to observe the day in a befitting manner to create greater awareness about BIMSTEC among the people of the region. In this regard, it welcomed India's proposal to host a BIMSTEC Film Festival on 6 June 2006.

25. It stressed the need for facilitating travel among cross section of people in BIMSTEC member states. It recommended the following in this regard:

- Liberalizing the visa regime;
- Introducing a BIMSTEC Visa Exemption Scheme for selected categories of officials and other persons; and
- Introducing uniform entry fee for visitors of BIMSTEC member states, similar to the fees charged to local visitors, to each others' heritage and archaeological sites of tourist attraction.

Report of the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (JWG-CTTC)

26. The SOM expressed satisfaction at the progress made in following up of the decisions of the First BIMSTEC Summit to co-ordinate efforts to combat the menace of international terrorism and transnational crime.

27. The SOM noted with satisfaction the progress made by the Joint Working Group following its first meeting (New Delhi, December 2004). It noted the outcome of the following meetings of the four sub-groups (ref. Doc. BIMSTEC/SOM.10/11):

- a. Sub-group on intelligence sharing (Lead Shepherd - Sri Lanka);
- b. Sub-group on financing of terrorism (Lead Shepherd - Thailand);
- c. Sub-group on legal and law enforcement issues (Lead Shepherd - India); and
- d. Sub-group on prevention of illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals (Lead Shepherd - Myanmar).

28. The SOM recommended convening of the Second Meeting of all sub-groups under the umbrella of the Working Group to take a holistic view of the issues and formulate recommendations for collective action in a comprehensive manner.

BIMSTEC Business Travel Card

29. The SOM reiterated the need for expediting action by member states to follow-up the First Summit decision to facilitate travel within the region, including business travel, through the introduction of a BIMSTEC Business Travel Card/Visa. The Meeting noted the revised schedule of the Expert Group Meeting during the first quarter of 2006 and recommended that the all issues relating to BIMSTEC Business Travel Card should be finalized by the Experts at their Meeting in Kathmandu.

VI. Private sector cooperation

30. The SOM encouraged the BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce and Industry to take a proactive role in promoting trade and investment *inter alia* through involvement and participation of the national chambers. The SOM reiterated its earlier recommendation that the apex Chambers of Commerce and Industry should coordinate their efforts. It also recommended that the BIMSTEC Chamber should submit a report in this regard to the STEOM in early 2006.

VII. Other areas under the First Summit Declaration

31. The SOM reviewed progress in the status of follow-up of the decision at the First Summit to explore the expansion of BIMSTEC Cooperation *inter alia* in the areas of culture, education, public health, protection of bio-diversity and traditional knowledge, weather & climate research, natural disaster mitigation & management.

32. The SOM welcomed the outcome of the workshop on Weather and Climate (New Delhi, 21-23 July 2005), including the decision to set up a BIMSTEC Weather and Climate Centre. It recommended that the Centre should have networking and collaborative arrangements with other relevant regional and national institutions or departments in the region, including the SAARC Metrological Research Centre (SMRC) and Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC).

33. The SOM agreed on the need for a collective response to the threats to public health in the region, including emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, SARS, avian influenza, malaria, dengue and tuberculosis, through sharing of information and expertise, technical cooperation, capacity building and other means. It welcomed Thailand's offer to share its experience in combating avian flu and encouraged other member states to take similar initiatives and projects. The Meeting welcomed the offer made by Thailand to provide additional one hundred fellowships for training in the area of public health.

VIII. BIMSTEC Centre and BIMSTEC website

34. The SOM noted the activities of the BIMSTEC Centre, as presented by the Thai delegation. The Meeting recommended that the Centre should continue to support the BWG. The Meeting welcomed India's offer to provide assistance for strengthening the BIMSTEC Centre.

35. The SOM noted the progress in maintenance of a BIMSTEC official website by the National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka. It also noted that unloading of the documents to the official website will be done under the supervision of the BWG.

36. The SOM noted the progress in registering the BIMSTEC Acronym, Logo and URL with the WIPO by Bangladesh as the Chair.

IX. BIMSTEC-ADB Cooperation :

37. The SOM noted ADB's proposal (doc. DIMSTEC/SOM.10/12) to establish collaborative relationship with BIMSTEC. It approved, for implementation, the ADB proposal to conduct a BIMSTEC Transport Logistics Study and agreed to consider other project proposals by ADB.

X. Dates of the future Meetings

38. Member countries briefed the SOM about the possible dates for the following meetings:
- a) Trade/Economic Ministers' Meeting preceded by Senior Trade and Economic Officials Meeting (Dhaka, first quarter of 2006)
 - b) Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation (Dhaka, first half of 2006)
 - c) Ministerial Meeting on Culture (Bhutan, May 2006)
 - d) Eleventh SOM (to be held in June/July 2006 in India) at which the Chairmanship would be handed over to India
 - e) Second BIMSTEC Energy Ministers' Conference (Thailand; fourth quarter of 2006)

XI. Dates of the Second Summit of BIMSTEC

39. The SOM welcomed the indication by India to host the Second BIMSTEC Summit in the first quarter of 2007.

XII. Provisional agenda and programme of the Ministerial Meeting

40. The SOM recommended adoption of the provisional agenda and programme of the Ministerial Meeting, as contained in document BIMSTEC/SOM.10/14 Rev.1 and BIMSTEC/SOM.10/13 respectively.

XIII. Consideration and adoption of the 10th SOM Report

41. The SOM adopted by consensus the report of the Tenth BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting contained in Document BIMSTEC/SOM.10/16.

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