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**SECRETARIAT  
 BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL  
 TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION  
 DHAKA**

**Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting  
 10 August 2017  
 Kathmandu, Nepal**

**Report of the Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting**

**Agenda Item 01: Opening of the Meeting**

01. The Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting was held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 10 August 2017.

02. Delegations from the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the Kingdom of Bhutan, the Republic of India, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Kingdom of Thailand participated in the Meeting. The list of the participants is at **Annex I**.

03. In the Opening Remarks, Mr. Shanker Das Bairagi, Foreign Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Nepal, welcomed all the distinguished delegates to the Meeting. While delivering the Remarks, he mentioned that concentration, deepening, action and result oriented cooperation should be the guiding principle and the modus operandi of the BIMSTEC process and urged the Member States to prioritize the areas of cooperation and focus on those, especially on trade and investment, transport and communications, technology, energy and counter-terrorism and transnational crime. He stated that although BIMSTEC has some moderate achievements in the last 20 years, but more could have been achieved to meet the expectation. Referring to the BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit, held in Goa, India in 2016, he suggested more similar outreach programmes for BIMSTEC with other similar regional groupings. The full text of the Opening Remarks is at **Annex II**.

04. While delivering the Special Remarks, Ambassador Sumith Nakandala, Secretary General of BIMSTEC expressed his deep gratitude to the Government of Nepal for hosting the Meeting. Referring to some milestone events of BIMSTEC, he stated that hosting of the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat in Goa in 2016 has added momentum to the BIMSTEC process. He also mentioned that although BIMSTEC has modest achievements for the last 20 years, it is important that the Member States take necessary actions to make the organization stronger, more effective and result oriented. The full text of the Special Remarks is at **Annex III**.

**Agenda Item 02: Election of the Chairperson of the Meeting**

05. As per the existing BIMSTEC practice, Mr. Shanker Das Bairagi, Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal as the Head of Delegation of the host Member State was elected to chair the Meeting. The Chair once again welcomed the delegates and elaborated the matters pertaining to the conduct of the Meeting.

**Agenda Item 03: Adoption of the Agenda**

06. The Meeting considered and adopted the Agenda as contained in the Secretariat's Document Number BIMSTEC/SOM/18/2017/01/Rev.4, which is at **Annex IV**.

**Agenda Item 04: Discussion on the Outcome of the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs held in New Delhi, India on 21 March 2017**

07. The Meeting extensively deliberated on the outcome of the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs (BNSC) held in New Delhi, India on 21 March 2017 as contained in the Secretariat's Document Number BIMSTEC/SOM/18/2017/02. The Delegation of India informed the Meeting of various follow-up actions being taken and sought members expeditious nominations for various working groups.

08. After extensive deliberation, the Meeting agreed to expeditiously implement the directives enshrined in the outcome document of the First Meeting of the BNSC. However, the delegation of Bhutan and Nepal expressed concerns over the jurisdictional issue on the implementation of the proposed BIMSTEC Himalayan Science Council in the outcome document of the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs and agreed to refer to the concerned authorities for consideration.

09. Bangladesh emphasized the significance and imperatives to explore the new areas of security threats and redress beyond traditional perception of security. The Delegation of Bangladesh thanked India for hosting the First Meeting of BNSC and offered to host the Second Meeting of the BNSC in 2018.

**Agenda Item 05: Consideration of the Report of the Seventh Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Legal and Law Enforcement Issues held in Yangon, Myanmar on 22-23 March 2017**

10. The Meeting considered and endorsed the Report of the Seventh Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Legal and Law Enforcement Issues held in Yangon, Myanmar on 22-23 March 2017 as contained in the Secretariat's Document Number BIMSTEC/SOM/18/2017/03 and approved the following along with the other recommendations contained therein:

- i. Changing of title of the Convention from the “Cooperation for Prevention and Combating of Human Trafficking” to “BIMSTEC Convention against Trafficking in Persons.”
- ii. The Member States will convey their comments and observations on the negotiated draft Text with a view to finalizing it at the Eighth Meeting of the Sub-Group.
- iii. Nepal will host the Eighth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Legal and Law Enforcement Issues in the first quarter of 2018.

**Agenda Item 06: Consideration of the Report of the Third Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks held in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 22-23 April 2017**

11. The Meeting considered and endorsed the Report of the Third Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks held in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 22-23 April 2017 as contained in the Secretariat’s Document Number BIMSTEC/SOM/18/2017/04 except the draft Terms of Reference for the BNPTT and decided the following:

- i. The Secretariat will circulate the draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for the BNPTT once again among the Member States for comments and observations.
- ii. No external funding beyond the Member States should be accepted for implementing any project. However, funding support from within the Member States may be accepted for carrying out BNPTT activities with the approval of the Member States.

**Agenda Item 07: Consideration of the Report of the Ninth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism held in Yangon, Myanmar on 26-27 April 2017**

12. The Meeting considered and endorsed the Report of the Ninth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism held in Yangon, Myanmar on 26-27 April 2017 as contained in the Secretariat’s Document Number BIMSTEC/SOM/18/2017/05 and endorsed the recommendations contained therein.

**Agenda Item 08: Consideration of the Report of the First Meeting of BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators held in New Delhi, India on 07 July 2017**

13. The Meeting considered and endorsed the Report of the First Meeting of BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators held in New Delhi, India on 07 July 2017 along with its recommendations as contained in the Secretariat’s Document Number

BIMSTEC/SOM/18/2017/06. India conveyed that it was working on BIMSTEC's participation in the International Tourism Mart being planned in Guwahati, India in November 2017. Sri Lanka offered to host the Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators in 2018.

**Agenda Item 09: Discussion on the progress of the outcome of the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat held in Goa, India on 16 October 2016 and the Agenda of Action, agreed by the Leaders of BIMSTEC during informal consultations at the Retreat**

14. The Meeting extensively deliberated on the progress of the outcome of the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat held in Goa, India on 16 October 2016 and the Agenda of Action, agreed by the Leaders of BIMSTEC during their informal consultations at the Retreat as contained in the Secretariat's Document Number BIMSTEC/MM/15/2017/03. The Meeting noted the progress already made and agreed to expedite implementation.

15. In order to implement the directives given by the Leaders, the Meeting decided the following in respect of each of the areas of cooperation:

**I. TRADE AND INVESTMENT**

- i. Nepal will expedite the submission of their comments and observations on the Draft Text on the Agreement on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in Customs Matters for the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area and Draft Text of the Rules of Origin and Operational and Certification Procedures under the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area.
- ii. Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka will convey the comments and observations on the Draft Text of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation for the BIMSTEC region as submitted by Bangladesh.

**II. CLIMATE CHANGE**

Bangladesh will host the BIMSTEC Experts' Workshop on Climate Change in 2017. The time-frame for the Workshop will be conveyed soon.

**III. ENERGY**

- i. Nepal will complete their internal procedures to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection at the Third Energy Ministers' Meeting which is expected to be held in Kathmandu, Nepal.

- ii. Once the MoU is signed, the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Coordination Committee (BGICC) will be established to undertake the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Master Plan Study.

#### **IV. AGRICULTURE**

- i. Thailand will host the Sixth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Agricultural Cooperation (EGAC) in December 2017. The date will be circulated through the Secretariat in due course.
- ii. Myanmar will convey its decision of hosting the First Agriculture Ministers' Meeting to the Secretariat.
- iii. The remaining Member States will submit their comments and observations on the Concept Paper on Strengthening Regional Value Chain in Marketing Pork Meat.

#### **V. PUBLIC HEALTH**

- i. India offered to host the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine (BTFTM) on 24-25 October 2017.
- ii. Bangladesh will host the Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of National Centers of Coordination in Traditional Medicine (BNNCTM) in 2017.
- iii. BIMSTEC Tele-medicine network through Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research (JIPMER), India has been launched involving 10 renowned medical institutes in the region.

#### **VI. TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION**

- i. The Member States will convey their comments and observations on the Draft Text of the Motor Vehicles Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger and Cargo Vehicular Traffic between and among the BIMSTEC Member States.
- ii. India will host the First Meeting of the Working Group to negotiate the Draft Text of the Motor Vehicles Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger and Cargo Vehicular Traffic between and among the BIMSTEC Member States in New Delhi, India on 26-27 October 2017.
- iii. The Member States will convey their comments and observations to the Secretariat on Draft Text of the "Agreement on Coastal Shipping Among BIMSTEC Member States" as submitted by India, as soon as possible.

- iv. Thailand introduced the draft Concept Paper on the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Connectivity and proposed that the BTCWG be tasked to develop the draft Master Plan for further consideration. The Member States will convey their comments and observations to the Secretariat on the draft Concept Paper on the “BIMSTEC Master Plan for Connectivity” as submitted by Thailand. The draft Concept Paper is at **Annex V**.

## **VII. TECHNOLOGY**

Sri Lanka will convene the Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on the Establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Colombo on 21-22 November 2017.

## **VIII. POVERTY ALLEVIATION**

- i. Sri Lanka will convene the Third BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation on 19-20 December 2017.
- ii. Nepal will host an expert group Meeting on Poverty Alleviation on 01 November 2017.

## **IX. COUNTER-TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME**

- i. India will conduct a training programme of 50 slots for capacity building for the personnel dealing with security matters in BIMSTEC Member States on the subjects relating to counter terrorism, cyber security, counter transnational crimes etc, at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy in Hyderabad on 06-17 November 2017.
- ii. In accordance with the decision of the First Meeting of the BNSC, India will host the First “BIMSTEC Track 1.5 Security Dialogue Forum” on 22 September 2017.
- iii. The Eighth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (JWG-CTTC) will be held in Bangladesh in 2017.

## **X. PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONTACT**

Bhutan will convey its decision to the Secretariat on hosting of the Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks in due course.

## **XI. FISHERIES**

Thailand will host a Training Workshop on Inland Aquaculture and Small-scale Inland Aquaculture Promotion for Fisheries Officers /Biologists from the BIMSTEC/IORA Member States in November 2017, in place of the previously agreed Meeting/Workshop to exchange information of combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in BIMSTEC Countries.

## **XII. TOURISM**

- i. Bangladesh will host the Second Meeting of BIMSTEC Tourism Working Group and the Third BIMSTEC Tourism Ministers' Roundtable in 2017.
- ii. The remaining Member States will expedite their one time contribution to the BIMSTEC Tourism Fund.

## **XIII. ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

India will convene the First BIMSTEC Annual Disaster Management Exercise on 10-13 October 2017.

## **XIV. CULTURE**

Bangladesh will host the Second BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Culture preceded by a BIMSTEC Cultural Festival in October 2017.

## **XV. BLUE ECONOMY and MOUNTAIN ECONOMY**

- i. Bangladesh will host an expert level International Conference on Blue Economy in October 2017.
- ii. Nepal will prepare a draft Concept Paper on Mountain Economy for circulation among the Member States.

## **XVI. BIMSTEC EMINENT PERSONS' GROUP**

Sri Lanka will revert to the Secretariat on hosting of the *ad-hoc* Working Group Meeting to finalize the ToR of the EPG.

## **XVII. BIMSTEC 2030 Agenda**

Bangladesh will host a Workshop on the Agenda 2030 to explore the interface between the UN Agenda 2030 and the BIMSTEC in December 2017.

**Agenda Item 10: Report by the Secretary General on the progress in areas of cooperation**

16. The Meeting considered the Secretary General's Report on the progress in the areas of cooperation as contained in the Secretariat's Document Number BIMSTEC/SOM/18/2017/07.

**Agenda Item 11: Hosting of the Eighth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group to consider the Administrative and Financial Matters of BIMSTEC Centers/Establishments**

17. The Meeting deliberated on the hosting of the Eighth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group to devise appropriate mechanism for Administrative and Financial Matters of BIMSTEC Centers, *i.e.*, BIMSTEC Energy Center, BIMSTEC Center for Weather and Climate, BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory and decided the following:

Sri Lanka will host the Eighth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group in 2018. The dates will be circulated through the Secretariat in due course.

**Agenda Item 12: Status on the Formation of Eminent Persons' Group (EPG)**

18. The Meeting deliberated on the status of the Formation of Eminent Persons' Group (EPG). The Meeting noted that India, Sri Lanka and Thailand have conveyed their comments on the draft Terms of Reference (ToR) of the EPG. The Meeting decided the following:

The remaining Member States, *i.e.*, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and Nepal will convey their comments and observations on the Draft ToR of the EPG to the Secretariat as soon as possible.

**Agenda Item 13: Progress on the Celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of BIMSTEC**

19. The Meeting noted the progress on the Celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of BIMSTEC as contained in the Secretariat's Document Number BIMSTEC/SOM/18/2017/08 and decided the following:

The Member States will undertake the activities as agreed by the 17<sup>th</sup> SOM to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of the BIMSTEC and will inform the Secretariat about the activities planned till 06 June 2018.

**Agenda Item 14: Status of the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Agreement**

20. The Meeting noted the progress and the status of the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Agreement. Referring to the Agenda of Action in respect of the trade and investment sector, as agreed during the informal consultations of the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat, the Meeting decided the following:



- i. Bangladesh urges the Member States to conclude the BIMSTEC FTA related constituent instruments and to expedite conclusion of BIMSTEC FTA negotiations. Bangladesh will convene the 21<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the BIMSTEC Trade Negotiating Committee in 2017. The dates will be conveyed through the Secretariat. Thailand requests that relevant documents be circulated before the Meeting.
- ii. On conclusion of the FTA negotiations, Bangladesh will also host the Fifth BIMSTEC Senior Trade and Economic Officials Meeting and the Sixth Trade and Economic Ministers' Meeting.
- iii. Bangladesh will host the First Meeting of the Working Group on BIMSTEC Trade Facilitation to negotiate the draft Agreement upon receipt of the comments and observations.

**Agenda Item 15: Status of signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection**

21. The Meeting noted the Status of signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection which was finalized at the Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials on Energy held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar from 11-12 January 2017 and recommended the following:

- i. Nepal will expedite their internal procedure to sign the MoU at the Third BIMSTEC Energy Ministers' Meeting.
- ii. Nepal will host the Third BIMSTEC Energy Ministers' Meeting in the early 2018. The dates will be conveyed through the Secretariat soon.

**Agenda Item 16: Status of signing and ratification of the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters**

22. The Meeting noted the status of signing of the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters which was finalized at the Fifth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Legal and Law Enforcement Issues held in New Delhi, India on 08-09 January 2013 and subsequently endorsed by the Seventh Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 04-05 August 2015.

23. After deliberations, the Meeting requested Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand to expeditiously complete their internal procedure to sign the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters.

**Agenda Item 17: Recommendation for Appointment of the next Secretary General of BIMSTEC**

24. The Meeting welcomed the nomination by the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Ambassador M. Shahidul Islam as the Second Secretary General of BIMSTEC, and recommended to the Fifteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting for his appointment with effect from 11 August 2017. For smooth handing and taking over, the Meeting further decided that Ambassador M. Shahidul Islam will assume his responsibility on 14 September 2017 from the outgoing Secretary General Ambassador Sumith Nakandala.

**Agenda Item 18: Discussion on the strengthening of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat**

- (i) **Appointment of Directors from the remaining Member States**
- (ii) **Purchasing of vehicle**
- (iii) **Expansion of the Secretariat premise**

25. The Meeting discussed and considered the Note by the Secretariat on the strengthening of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat as contained in the Secretariat's Document Number BIMSTEC/SOM/18/2017/09.

26. After extensive deliberations, the Meeting directed the Secretariat the following:

- i. The Secretariat will discuss with the host Government, *i.e.*, Bangladesh, for additional infrastructures/facilities for the Secretariat
- ii. The proposal for posting of additional directors and procuring additional vehicle will be discussed at the 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group (JWG) on the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat.

**Agenda Item 19: Finalization of the Draft Joint Statement of the Fifteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting**

27. The Meeting deliberated extensively and finalized the Draft Joint Statement of the Fifteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting as contained in the Secretariat's Document Number BIMSTEC/SOM/18/2017/10/Rev.2. The finalized Draft Joint Statement is at **Annex VI**.

**Agenda Item 20: Discussion on the hosting of the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit**

28. Nepal will host the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit. The date will be communicated through the Secretariat.

**Agenda Item 21: Any Other Matters**

**Status of the BIMSTEC Flag and BIMSTEC Logo**

29. The delegation of Sri Lanka proposed to discuss the issue of BIMSTEC Flag and BIMSTEC Logo. The Delegation of India updated the Meeting on the current status. The Meeting agreed that India will continue its initiative for finalization of the BIMSTEC Flag and the BIMSTEC Logo taking into consideration the comments and observations made by the Member States on the previously circulated Note.

**Agenda Item 22: Date and Venue of the Nineteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting**

30. The Nineteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting will be held back-to-back with the Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting and the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit in Kathmandu, Nepal.

**Agenda Item 23: Consideration and Adoption of the Report of the Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting**

31. The Meeting considered and adopted the draft Report of the **Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting** for submission to the Fifteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting to be held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 10-11 August 2017.

**Agenda Item 24: Closing of the Meeting**

32. The Meeting conveyed its deep appreciation and gratitude to the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal for extending warm hospitality and excellent arrangement made for the Meeting. The Chair thanked the Delegations for their valuable contributions and active participation in the Meeting. The Meeting also expressed appreciation to the Chair for his able stewardship in steering the Meeting.

33. The Meeting also expressed sincere thanks to the Secretary General and his team for their hard work and efforts in facilitating the Meeting to a successful conclusion.

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**SECRETARIAT  
BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL  
TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION  
DHAKA**

**Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting  
10 August 2017  
Kathmandu, Nepal**

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**Annex II**

**Opening Statement by Mr. Shanker Das Bairagi, Foreign Secretary of Nepal at the Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting in his capacity as the Chair**

**Kathmandu, 10 August 2017**

**Foreign Secretaries of BIMSTEC Member States**

**His Excellency Mr. Sumith Nakandala, Secretary General of BIMSTEC**

**Distinguished Delegates**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is my pleasure to begin the Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting. Let me extend a warm welcome to your Excellencies, the Foreign Secretaries, Heads of delegations, and the Distinguished Delegates representing BIMSTEC Member States.

In the two-decade's history of BIMSTEC, the organization has expanded to fourteen areas of cooperation. Our time, efforts, energy and resources have been hugely invested in promoting cooperation in these sectors. As the Secretary General's report states, some progress has been made in these areas. However, there is a huge gap between our expectations and progress we have made so far. Therefore, we need to streamline the agreed areas of cooperation with priority focus on economic sector and connectivity if we intend to deliver concrete outcomes. Concentration, not proliferation; deepening, not widening; and action and results, not just formal decisions and commitments should be our guiding principles and modus operandi in the BIMSTEC process.

I fondly recall our last Meeting held in Kathmandu in February earlier this year where we had taken a number of important decisions to revitalize the BIMSTEC process. Formation of EPG, finalization of BIMSTEC FTA, enhanced cooperation in core economic areas, and formation of various Working Groups were the key decisions and recommendations. We have to take up these matters urgently and with due priority.

It is a fact that our region is the least integrated region, as BIMSTEC FTA is yet to be finalized. As a result, possibilities of intra-regional trade have remained untapped.

Connectivity was another important agenda discussed in all three Summits and most of the Ministerial Meetings. I appreciate the Member States taking the lead for preparing the draft texts particularly, in the sector of trade (Trade Facilitation Agreement-by Bangladesh) and connectivity (Motor Vehicles Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger and Cargo Vehicular Traffic between and among BIMSTEC Member States-by India) and I expect these will be finalized soon.

Technology is a critical factor for accelerated development. Transfer of technology is one of the original ideas for regional cooperation under BIMSTEC. I am hopeful that the Fourth Expert Group Meeting will finalize the MoA and pave the way for the early functioning of the technology transfer facility.

The finalization of the MoU on the Grid Interconnection will be instrumental in exploiting abundant energy potentials and promote clean energy trade. I expect that the remaining member states including my own country will complete their internal procedures at the earliest to be able to sign it in the next opportunity.

Menace of terrorism has alarmed us to work collectively to counter its threat. We condemn terrorism regardless of its forms and manifestations and reiterate our commitment for early conclusion of BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking and BIMSTEC Convention on MLA.

The BRICS-BIMSTEC Summit back-to-back with the BRICS Summit in Goa last year, gracefully hosted by the Government of India, provided a good platform for the BIMSTEC leaders to explore potentials of cooperation with BRICS Countries. It is our expectation that the Ministerial Meeting tomorrow and the upcoming Fourth Summit will be the landmark events to deliberate on and take the BIMSTEC to a new height.

I would like to underline that established institutional mechanisms (especially regional centers) have to be made operational and effective to execute their mandate and also focus on the speedy implementation of the 16 point Agenda of Action, as agreed by our leaders during BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat last year.

I certainly do not intend to speak on all our issues. We will have opportunity to discuss them all when we take a specific agenda item.

I would like to conclude my opening remarks, with the confidence of soliciting frank views and comments from your Excellencies on each and every item of the agenda, and steering the Meeting to a successful conclusion with a good outcome. I now declare the opening of the Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting.

I request His Excellency Mr. Sumith Nakandala, the Secretary General of BIMSTEC, to make his statement.

**Annex III**

**Special Remarks by Ambassador Sumith Nakandala, Secretary General of BIMSTEC  
at the Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting  
10 August 2017  
Kathmandu, Nepal**

**His Excellency Shanker Das Bairagi, Foreign Secretary of Nepal,**

**Excellencies,**

**Ambassadors of BIMSTEC Member States,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Colleagues**

At the outset, let me express my deep gratitude to the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal for hosting the 18<sup>th</sup> Senior Officials' Meeting. I am very grateful to you, Mr. Chairman and to our colleagues at the Ministry for working very hard to realize this important Meeting. It has been a pleasure and privilege to work with you, Mr. Chairman.

We met on 07 February this year in Kathmandu and I am happy to note that we collectively have been able to revitalize the sectoral cooperation in BIMSTEC and to implement the directives given by our Leaders at their Retreat in Goa in 2016.

As the First Secretary General, I would venture to say that the BIMSTEC has modest achievements for the last 20 years. One of the most important achievements is the establishment of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat.

In this regard, I wish to express my deep gratitude to the Government of Bangladesh as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh for its commitment and leadership in operationalizing the BIMSTEC Secretariat.

For the last 2 years, the Secretariat has facilitated 58 Meetings and outreach programmes under different sectoral cooperation.

As of 01 June 2017, I am glad to state that the BIMSTEC Secretariat has achieved its full strength comprising of three directors from Bangladesh, Bhutan and India. I wish to record my appreciation to the Government of India for deputing its Director to the Secretariat.

In terms of achievements, we have been able to conclude “The BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study (BTILS) Updating and Enhancement” and convened the Inception Meeting of the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group in Bangkok in 2016. We will continue to work with the Asian Development Bank in terms of preparing the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Connectivity, as proposed by Thailand.

We have been able to convene the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC National Security Advisors in New Delhi this year. I wish to express my gratitude to the Government of India for its leadership in articulating the regional security architecture.

This Meeting has provided a rare opportunity for the BIMSTEC Member States to look at the Bay of Bengal region as a strategic security space and to address perennial problems related to human security.

The BIMSTEC Track 1.5 Security Dialogue will be held in New Delhi 22 September 2017. This Dialogue will be an important platform for the practitioners and policy makers in the region.

In Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime sector, the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters is almost ready for signature. Currently, the BIMSTEC is negotiating the BIMSTEC Convention against Trafficking in Persons.

In Energy cooperation sector, the Memorandum of Understanding for the establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection is also ready for signature.

I have always held the view that no regional groupings will succeed without effective leadership.

We are extremely grateful to the Honourable Prime Minister of India for providing that leadership and hosting the BIMSTEC Leaders’ Retreat in Goa, India on 16 October 2016.

The Leaders’ Retreat has provided added political commitment and momentum which is necessary in achieving desired goals of the Organization, The Leaders at the Retreat agreed to conclude, The Motor Vehicles Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger and Cargo Vehicular Traffic between and among BIMSTEC Member States, the BIMSTEC Trade Facilitation Agreement, Customs Cooperation Agreement and the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement. Draft texts for these have been circulated and it is important that we finalize these important instruments during the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our organization. There is no doubt that these regional legal frameworks will deepen the integration process in the Bay of Bengal region.

In the People-to-People Contact sector, the BIMSTEC Secretariat in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand and the Chulalongkorn University hosted a successful International Conference on “Strengthening Cultural Linkages in the Bay of Bengal Region” in 28 May 2017 in Bangkok. The Conference looked at in detailed the narratives associated with the Bay of Bengal region and its people.

The third decade for the BIMSTEC is extremely crucial in achieving the goals set by our Leaders at the Retreat held in Goa in 2016. In this regard, one of the important aspects is the early conclusion of the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area. If we believe in regional integration, then the BIMSTEC FTA is a basic but indispensable foundation. I hope that the Member States will succeed in concluding the much awaited BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Agreement as a landmark event during the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of BIMSTEC.

I wish to record my deep appreciation to all the Member States for their contribution in fostering regional integration in the Bay of Bengal region since its inception.

Professor Sunil Amirth in his celebrated book titled “Crossing Bay of Bengal” aptly said that “the Bay of Bengal was once a region at the heart of global history and it was forgotten in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.”

While delivering the Keynote Address at the International Conference on “Strengthening Cultural Linkages in the Bay of Bengal Region” in 27 May 2017 in Bangkok, Dr. Amrith said that “that the history of the Bay of Bengal as a region is a history of the translation of ideas and cultural practices in the process of movement, the deepening of linkages between the peoples of the ocean’s rim.”

Over centuries, the Bay was instrumental in building bonds between humankind and it is a story and constructive narrative of the human civilization.

In conclusion, it is my firm belief that the regional cooperation will not succeed only with political commitment by the Leaders. What is more necessary is the non-parochial mind set and transcending pettiness supplemented by deep understanding of pluralistic values in the region. These have been the integral elements of intangible heritage of the peoples in the Bay of Bengal region for centuries.

I am certain that people in the Bay of Bengal region is capable of achieving the goals based on the historical legacy. If we do that, I am confident that BIMSTEC will be a model for the rest of the world as a vibrant social justice project. That is the only way to bring the Bay of Bengal into the heart of the world history again.

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**SECRETARIAT**  
**BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL**  
**TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION**  
**DHAKA**

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**Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting**  
**10 August 2017**  
**Kathmandu, Nepal**

**Agenda<sup>1</sup>**

01. Opening of the Meeting
02. Election of the Chairperson of the Meeting
03. Adoption of the Agenda
04. Discussion on the Outcome of the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs held in New Delhi, India on 21 March 2017
05. Consideration of the Report of the Seventh Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Legal and Law Enforcement Issues held in Yangon, Myanmar on 22-23 March 2017
06. Consideration of the Report of the Third Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks held in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 22-23 April 2017
07. Consideration of the Report of the Ninth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism held in Yangon, Myanmar on 26-27 April 2017
08. Consideration of the Report of the First Meeting of BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators held in New Delhi, India on 07 July 2017

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<sup>1</sup> As adopted on 10 August 2017



09. Discussion on the progress of the outcome of the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat held in Goa, India on 16 October 2016 and the Agenda of Action, agreed by the Leaders of BIMSTEC during informal consultations at the Retreat
10. Report by the Secretary General on the progress in areas of cooperation
11. Hosting of the Eighth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group to consider the Administrative and Financial Matters of BIMSTEC Centers/Establishments
12. Status on the Formation of Eminent Persons' Group (EPG)
13. Progress on the Celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of BIMSTEC
14. Status of the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Agreement
15. Status of signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection
16. Status of signing and ratification of the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters
17. Recommendation for Appointment of the next Secretary General of BIMSTEC
18. Discussion on the strengthening of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat
  - (i) Appointment of Directors from the remaining Member States
  - (ii) Purchasing of vehicle
  - (iii) Expansion of the Secretariat premise
19. Finalization of the Draft Joint Statement of the Fifteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting
20. Discussion on the hosting of the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit
21. Any Other Matters
22. Date and Venue of the Nineteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting
23. Consideration and Adoption of the Report of the Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting
24. Closing of the Meeting

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**Draft**  
**Concept Paper**  
**BIMSTEC Master Plan for Connectivity**

**Background and Rational**

- The global economic center of gravity is shifting to the Indo-Pacific Region. BIMSTEC lies at the heart of this emerging Indo-Pacific Community. BIMSTEC is home for 1.5 billion people or approximately 22% of the world's population, with a combined GDP of 2.8 trillion USD with an average growth rate of 6%, as well as possessing abundant natural resources and geographical advantages. Notably, the added geographical advantage of BIMSTEC, when linked with other major economies, such as ASEAN, East Asia, the Middle East and Africa, through the various connectivity schemes, drawing upon our vast economic strengths and diversity, shall account for over half of the global market.

- In view of BIMSTEC's potentials, Thailand, therefore, proposed BIMSTEC Master Plan for Connectivity at the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat in Goa on 16 October 2016. The Master Plan will highlight strategic goals and practical action plans reflecting the dynamism of the current regional and global architecture while serving the needs and priorities of BIMSTEC Countries and addressing the fast evolving challenges of today's global order.

- This Master Plan will also complement and reinforce other existing regional cooperation frameworks including the Master Plan for ASEAN Connectivity 2025, Ganga-Mekong Initiative, and Bangkok Declaration of the 2nd Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) Summit, as well as other ongoing efforts such as the ACMECS Master Plan on Connectivity, and the IORA Master Plan on Connectivity which are being developed.

**Objective of the Master Plan:** Seamless connectivity between BIMSTEC with ASEAN and beyond to enhance inclusive growth and economic prosperity in the BIMSTEC economies.

**Goals and Action Plans:**

- (1) **Goal 1: Hardware Connectivity:** To achieve multimodal connectivity including roads, rails, maritime, and aviation, especially those that could yield greater access to new trade and investment opportunities within BIMSTEC and beyond, and eventually enable BIMSTEC to become a global gateway.

**Suggested Action Plans:**

- (1.1) **Prioritize the key BIMSTEC infrastructure projects under the BTILS Action Plan 2014 - 2020 including its updated Work Plan as agreed to be undertaken at the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group (BTCWG) Meeting in August 2016, and expedite the implementation of those projects, taking into account other relevant frameworks and ongoing initiatives including but not limited to ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity 2025.**

- (1.2) (a) Upon approval by BIMSTEC Ministers, reach conclusion on the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement at Leaders' level; (b) Seek greater physical and economic connectivity between South and South East Asia through investments in relevant infrastructure projects; and (c) Discuss BIMSTEC Economical, Technical and Infrastructure Cooperation.

- (2) ***Goal 2: Software Connectivity:*** To achieve the synchronization of rules, regulations, policies and measures related to transportation and communication among BIMSTEC Countries with a view to facilitating cross-border movement of BIMSTEC nationals, goods and services, as well as to finalize BIMSTEC FTA.

**Suggested Action Plans:**

- (2.1) Improve cross-border facilitation and management through **inter-operationalization** of technical standards and systems related to transportation and communication at the specific cross-border checkpoints of BIMSTEC Countries, taking into account the progress made and incomplete projects under the BTILS Action Plan 2014 - 2020 including its updated Work Plan.
- (2.2) **Harmonization** of rules and regulations related to transportation and communication among BIMSTEC Countries by using the basis of existing frameworks such as GMS CBTA.
- (3) ***Human Resources Development:*** To produce smart workers in the transportation and communication related fields.

**Suggested Action Plans:**

- (3.1) **promotion of Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) in enhancing capacity building and human resource development, especially those of strategic importance to the border checkpoints** (such as custom officials, quarantine unit, immigration officers, traffic polices, etc.) with a view to lessening logistics costs and transit time; and
- (3.2) **development of training courses and exchange of strategic personnel** to enhance knowledge and expertise on transportation and communication related regulations.
- (3.3) Promote synergies and enhance further engagement among BIMSTEC members at all levels, especially people-to-people to become a global destination for **cultural, sustainable, green tourism** with a value-based economy.

**Guidelines for Implementation**

- **Emphasise complementarity and reduce duplication** between BIMSTEC Master Plan and other existing frameworks and ongoing initiatives of the region, such as ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity 2025, ACMECS, IORA.

- **Build upon and strengthen existing BIMSTEC mechanisms and work plans, such as BTILS.**
- This Master Plan will be **reinforced by bilateral and trilateral Joint Development Strategies**, such as the Trilateral Highway linking India, Myanmar, and Thailand.
- Promote overall and closer coordination **with BIMSTEC development partners** specifically on **financing and technical assistance**, such as international financial institutions and development banks, as well as private sectors through existing frameworks.
- **Task BTCWG**, which was established in 2016, to develop the Master Plan and propose for consideration of the Senior Officials, Ministers, and for eventual adoption by Leaders.

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Annex VI

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**SECRETARIAT  
BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL  
TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION  
DHAKA**

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**Eighteenth Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting  
10 August 2017  
Kathmandu, Nepal**

**Agenda Item 19: Finalization of the Draft Joint Statement of the Fifteenth  
BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting**



**BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-  
SECTORAL TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC  
COOPERATION**

**DRAFT JOINT STATEMENT OF THE FIFTEENTH BIMSTEC  
MINISTERIAL MEETING  
11 August 2017  
Kathmandu, Nepal**

The Fifteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was convened in Kathmandu, Nepal on 10-11 August 2017.

The Fifteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was attended by His Excellency Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, M.P., Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh; His Excellency Lyonpo Damcho Dorji, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Royal Government of Bhutan; Her Excellency Smt. Sushma Swaraj, External Affairs Minister of the Government of the Republic of India; His Excellency Mr. Kyaw Tin, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar; His Excellency Mr.

Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of Nepal; His Excellency Mr. Vasantha Senanayake, State Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and His Excellency Mr. Virasakdi Futrakul, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand and their respective delegations.

The Right Honourable Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba, Prime Minister of Nepal, inaugurated the Meeting. In his inaugural address, the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister underlined the need for concerted efforts in order to advance deeper regional cooperation in the BIMSTEC region.

The Ministers also called on the Rt. Hon. Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba, the Prime Minister of the Government of Nepal.

The Honourable Mr. Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal, chaired the Meeting.

The Meeting considered and approved the Reports of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Sessions of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meetings held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 07 February 2017 and 10 August 2017 respectively.

**At the conclusion of the Meeting, the Leaders of Delegation issued the following Joint Statement:**

***We recall*** the 1997 Bangkok Declaration establishing BIMSTEC and agree to intensify our collaborative efforts to realise the aims and purposes of BIMSTEC embodied therein and pledge to make BIMSTEC stronger, more effective and result oriented.

***We note*** the progress made by BIMSTEC since we last met in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 03 March 2014.

***We express*** our deep gratitude to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh for hosting the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat in Dhaka and also providing the required logistical support to the Secretariat.

**We further express** our deep gratitude to the Government of the Republic of India for hosting the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat in Goa, India on 16 October 2016.

**We reaffirm** our commitment to intensify our efforts to realise the directives outlined and the Agenda of Action as agreed by the Leaders during the Goa Retreat.

We agree on the following:

## **I. TRADE AND INVESTMENT**

- (i) **We emphasize** the need for greater cooperation in trade and investment in order to deepen regional integration in the Bay of Bengal region. We recognize the paramount importance of early conclusion of BIMSTEC Free Trade Area and direct the Trade Negotiating Committee and Working Groups to expedite the finalization of its constituent Agreements.
- (ii) **We stress** on the need to expedite the negotiations on the Agreements on Services and Investment to augment economic cooperation in the region.
- (iii) **We underscore** the importance of trade facilitation in our region and urge authorities for early finalization of the BIMSTEC Trade Facilitation Agreement. **We welcome** the offer of Bangladesh to host the first Meeting of the Working Group to negotiate the Trade Facilitation Agreement. **We also welcome** the offer of Bangladesh to host the Sixth Trade and Economic Ministers' Meeting and the Eighth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Business Forum in 2017.
- (iv) **We underline** the necessity of early finalization of the BIMSTEC Agreement on Mutual Assistance on Customs Matters.

## II. CLIMATE CHANGE

- (i) **We note** with great concern of the increasing threat to our planet and livelihoods of the people from climate change and agree to combat the same at local, national and regional levels. **We also commit** to implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.
- (ii) **We welcome** the offer of the Government of Bangladesh to convene the BIMSTEC Experts' Workshop on Climate Change in 2017.

## III. ENERGY

- (i) **We note** with satisfaction that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection is ready for signature. **We agree** to complete the internal procedures to sign the MoU at the earliest.
- (ii) **We recognize** the high potentials of energy sources in the region, particularly renewable and clean energy sources and agree to expedite our efforts to develop a comprehensive plan for Energy Cooperation within the region. **We agree** to explore the possibilities of promoting energy trade in the region.
- (iii) **We welcome** the offer of the Government of Nepal to host the Third BIMSTEC Energy Ministers' Meeting in the early 2018.
- (iv) **We emphasize** on the early operationalization of the BIMSTEC Energy Centre in order to strengthen energy cooperation in the region in a comprehensive manner.



#### IV. AGRICULTURE

- (i) **We note** with satisfaction the progress made by the Expert Group on Agricultural Cooperation and urge the Member States to collectively implement the common projects identified for enhancing Agricultural Cooperation.
- (ii) **We recognize** the availability of vast plant biodiversity in the region and underscore the importance of enhancing cooperation in plant germplasm exchange and recommend to explore the possibility of concluding a framework agreement on plant germplasm exchange and material transfer, taking into account the readiness and internal procedures of each Member State.
- (iii) **We endorse** the convening of the First BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture on a priority basis.

#### V. PUBLIC HEALTH

- (i) **We recognize** the importance of the public health care among the BIMSTEC Member States in holistic manner and the need to establish alliances for both traditional and non-traditional medicines.
- (ii) **We welcome** the offer of Bangladesh to host the Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of National Centers of Coordination in Traditional Medicine and the offer of India to host the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine (BTFTM).
- (iii) **We welcome** the launch of BIMSTEC Tele-medicine Network by JIPMER India to strengthen collaboration among premier medical institutions in the region.

## VI. TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION

- (i) **We emphasize** that enhanced transport and communication is the key to regional integration and agree to expedite comments and observations on the BIMSTEC Framework Agreement on Transit, Transshipment and Movement of Vehicular Traffic (BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement) as well as the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement with a view to negotiate and conclude these at the earliest.
- (ii) **We take** note of Thailand's draft Concept Paper on BIMSTEC Master Plan for Connectivity and task the BTCWG to develop the draft Master Plan for further consideration.
- (iii) **We express** our appreciation to the Asian Development Bank for conducting the BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study and note the progress made so far in implementation of the recommendations of the Study as well as look forward to its successful implementation.

## VII. TECHNOLOGY

- (i) **We recognize** the huge potentials and imperative for cooperation in Science and Technology and ICT sector among the Member States.
- (ii) **We recognize** the importance of access and availability of technology for promoting sustainable development and urge the authorities to expedite the conclusion of the Memorandum of Association on the establishment of the BIMSTEC Centre for Technology Transfer Facility in Sri Lanka.
- (iii) **We welcome** the offer of Sri Lanka to host the Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on the establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Colombo in November 2017

## VIII. POVERTY ALLEVIATION

- (i) **We recall** the BIMSTEC Poverty Plan of Action as adopted by the Second BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation in Nepal in 2012 and **reaffirm** our commitment to its effective implementation in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- (ii) **We welcome** the offer of Sri Lanka to host the Third BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation in December 2017 and also welcome the offer of Nepal to host an Expert level Meeting on 1 November 2017.
- (iii) **We welcome** the offer of Bangladesh to host a workshop to explore the interface between the Agenda 2030 and the BIMSTEC in December 2017.

## IX. COUNTER-TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

- (i) **We reiterate** the strong commitment of our Leaders to combat terrorism, which remains the single most significant threat to peace and stability in our region, in all its forms and manifestations, and agree to take concrete measures to step up cooperation and coordination among our law enforcement, intelligence and security organisations. **We also agree** to expedite the ratification of the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking, signed in Myanmar on 11 December 2009 and also to complete the internal procedures to sign the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters at the earliest.
- (ii) **We note** with satisfaction that the Member States have commenced negotiations on BIMSTEC Convention Against Trafficking in Persons and urge early conclusion of the Convention.

- (iii) **We offer** our gratitude to the Government of India for hosting the First Annual Meeting of the National Security Chiefs in New Delhi on 21 March 2017. **We agree** to implement the recommendations of the Meeting to counter terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization; and deepen cooperation to deal with traditional and non-traditional security threats in a comprehensive manner.

## X. PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONTACT

- (i) **We note** with satisfaction the conclusion of the Third Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks in Dhaka, on 22-23 April 2017 and urge authorities to implement the recommendations of the Meeting in order to intensify people-to-people contact at various levels. **We reiterate** our Leaders' commitment in strengthening linkages among the educational and research institutions in our region.
- (ii) **We express** our gratitude to the Government of Thailand for hosting the First International Conference on Strengthening Cultural Linkages in the Bay of Bengal region, as part of celebration of BIMSTEC's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, for deeper understanding among the people.
- (iii) **We note** with satisfaction that the Secretariat has organized two BIMSTEC Foundation Lectures and Ten Round-Table Meetings to promote the people-to-people contact among the Member States.

## XI. FISHERIES

- (i) **We recall** the importance given by our Leaders on sustainable development of fisheries in making significant contribution towards ensuring food security and improving the livelihood of the people of our region and agree to constitute an Expert Group on Fisheries to prepare a plan of action.

- (ii) **We welcome** the offer from Thailand to organize a “Training Workshop on Inland Aquaculture and Small-scale Inland Aquaculture Promotion for Fisheries Officers/Biologist for the BIMSTEC/IOA Member Countries”.

## **XII. TOURISM**

- (i) **We agree** to constitute an *Ad-hoc* Expert Group to establish the BIMSTEC Buddhist Tourist Circuit and Temple Tourist Circuit in the region as encouraged by our Leaders during the Retreat.
- (ii) **We express** our gratitude to the Government of India for convening the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators in New Delhi on 07 July 2017 and agree to expeditiously implement recommendations of the Meeting.
- (iii) **We note** the establishment of BIMSTEC Tourism Fund by the Member States and welcome the offer of Bangladesh to host the Third BIMSTEC Tourism Ministers’ Round-Table.

## **XIII. ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

- (i) **We welcome** the offer of the Government of India to organize the First Annual BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise in October 2017.
- (ii) **We recall** the directives of our Leaders for closer and intensified cooperation in Disaster Management and agree to establish an Expert Group on Disaster Management.

## **XIV. CULTURE**

- (i) **We agree** to expedite the establishment and operationalization of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) and BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO) in Bhutan as directed by our Leaders during the Retreat.

- (ii) **We welcome** the offer of the Government of Bangladesh to host the Second BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Culture preceded by a BIMSTEC Cultural Festival in 2017.

## **XV. BLUE ECONOMY and MOUNTAIN ECONOMY**

- (i) **We recall** the directives of the Leaders during their Retreat to explore ways to deepen cooperation in areas of Blue Economy with the objective of holistic sustainable development of our region and agree to constitute a Working Group to determine the modalities in this regard.
- (ii) **We welcome** the offer of the Government of Bangladesh to host an International Conference on Blue Economy in October 2017.
- (iii) We welcome the offer of Nepal to host an Expert level Meeting on mountain economy in 2017.

## **XVI. BIMSTEC EMINENT PERSONS' GROUP**

- (i) **We agree** for an early establishment of the BIMSTEC Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) to recommend a future roadmap for BIMSTEC Agenda for 2030.

**We note** with satisfaction the activities and commemorative events undertaken so far to celebrate the Twentieth Anniversary of the establishment of the BIMSTEC. **We reiterate** our commitment to undertake further activities to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of BIMSTEC.

**We note** the tasks undertaken by the Secretariat since its establishment in 2014 in conducting and facilitating various BIMSTEC Meetings and events including the First BIMSTEC Film Festival in Dhaka.

**We express** our appreciation to the First Secretary General of BIMSTEC, Mr. Sumith Nakandala, for his valuable contribution in the operationalization and functioning of the Secretariat.

**We endorse** the appointment of Ambassador M. Shahidul Islam of Bangladesh as the Second Secretary General of BIMSTEC with effect from 11 August 2017. However, to facilitate smooth handling and taking over, Ambassador M. Shahidul Islam will assume his responsibility on 14 September 2017 from the outgoing Secretary General Ambassador Mr. Sumith Nakandala.

We, the leaders of delegation of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand wish to express our profound appreciation to the Government of Nepal for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements made for the Meeting.

We look forward to meeting in Nepal for the Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting and the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit.

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