

2nd BIMST-EC Ministerial Meeting

Dhaka, 19 December, 1998

Joint Statement of the BIMST-EC Ministerial Meeting

The 2nd Ministerial Meeting of BIMST-EC was convened in Dhaka on 19 December, 1998 attended by H.E. Mr Abdul Hasan Chowdhury, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of Bangladesh, H.E. Mrs Vasundhara Raje, Minister of State for External Affairs, Republic of India, H.E. U Khin Maung Win, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Union of Myanmar, H.E. Mr Lakshman Kiriella, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and H.E. M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand and their respective delegations.

At the conclusion of their meeting, the Leaders of Delegations issued the following Joint Statement:

1. We reaffirm the aims, purposes and principles contained in the Bangkok Declaration of June 6, 1997 on the establishment of the Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand-Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC) and the Declaration of December 22, 1997 on the admission of the Union of Myanmar and renaming BIST-EC as BIMST-EC (Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand-Economic Cooperation).
2. We note with satisfaction the progress already achieved towards the realization of the objectives agreed among us at the special BIMST-EC Ministerial Meeting organized in Bangkok on December 22, 1997.
3. We adopt the criteria for admission of Observers and Guests in future appropriate meetings of BIMST-EC. We welcome all countries and international organizations satisfying the criteria, principles and procedures which we have adopted (defined in the document annexed to this statement), and who may wish to participate in the activities of BIMST-EC as Observers or Guests, and are desirous of contributing to the realization of the goals of social, economic and industrial cooperation and progress within the BIMST-EC sub-region.
4. We note the interest of Nepal in BIMST-EC activities and welcome Nepal as an Observer.
5. We emphasize the need for establishing a BIMST-EC Economic Forum which will work as an important engine of greater economic co-operation and progress within the BIMST-EC sub-region. We reiterate our resolve to take all necessary steps for making the BIMST-EC Economic Forum operational for convening at the next BIMST-EC Ministerial Meeting. We welcome the agreement of Bangladesh, current Chairman of BIMST-EC, to take initial steps in establishing the Economic Forum. The BIMST-EC Economic Forum will serve to promote Government-Private Sector cooperation among the member countries.
6. We welcome the formation of the BIMST-EC Business Forum by the representatives of private sector of BIMST-EC countries at a meeting organized by ESCAP in Bangkok in March 1998. We hope that the BIMST-EC Business Forum will enhance private sector cooperation among the member-countries of the BIMST-EC region in identified sectors, sub-sectors and projects.

7. We have identified six sectors for cooperation namely, Trade & Investment, Technology, Transportation and Communication, Energy, Tourism and Fisheries. We appreciate the initiatives taken by the member countries to act as Lead Countries in the sectors, sub-sectors and projects as identified by the SOM. We request the respective Lead Countries to take further steps to form sectoral committees for which they have offered to become lead countries so that these committees can draw up detailed proposals of cooperation for implementation. We call upon the lead countries of various sectoral committees to convene the meetings as soon as possible and report the progress to the next Ministerial Meeting.
8. We encourage the participation of the private sector, as required, in BIMST-EC activities at the sectoral, sub-sectoral and project level.
9. We express our appreciation and gratitude to H.E. Dr Supachai Panitchpakdi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Commerce of the Royal Thai Government for his initiative in organizing the BIMST-EC Economic Ministerial Retreat of August 7, 1998 in Bangkok. The guidelines provided in the form of agreed conclusions reached by the Economic Ministers served as important inputs towards formulation of the work plan of BIMST-EC and would enhance and deepen the scope of trade, investment and infrastructure cooperation among member countries.
10. We reaffirm the significant potential for cooperation in tourism sector in promoting people to people contact and reinforcing the historical, cultural and economic synergies of the BIMST-EC sub-region. We appreciate the initiative of India, taken in pursuance of the decisions of the Special Ministerial Meeting of December 1997, in convening the Tourism Summit in Calcutta in October 1998 and note the Action Plan adopted at the Meeting. We welcome the recommendation to declare the Year 2001 as Visit BIMST-EC Tourism Year and call upon the concerned authorities and private sectors to take tangible steps towards this.
11. Conscious of the important role that can be played by transport and communication linkages in enhancing commercial, industrial, cultural and social interaction and tourism in the BIMST-EC sub-region, we reiterate the emphasis that we place on developing rail, road, multi-modal transport, shipping and air linkages. This would reinforce complementarities arising out of the Bay of Bengal rim identity of BIMST-EC. In this context, we recognize the importance of the speedy implementation of BIMST-EC component of Trans Asian Railway and Asian Highway Projects.
12. We reaffirm that the energy sector being another important dimension of BIMST-EC cooperation, it will receive priority attention. Efforts will be made to draw up appropriate action plans and to work out arrangements for the enhancement of cooperation in the areas of natural gas, wind, solar and water/tidal wave energy resources.
13. We reiterate the need for the promotion of cooperation in Fisheries, through the conduct of a comprehensive study on marine resources, processing and marketing to be conducted in coordination with the relevant international organizations.
14. We acknowledge the important contribution of ESCAP towards furthering economic cooperation among the BIMST-EC countries. We request that, in pursuance of the UN GA draft resolution (agenda item 114 on Programme Planning, ref. doc. no. A/C.5/53/L.18 dated 11 December 1998), ESCAP should continue to play an active role in the BIMST-EC projects by assisting the various sectoral committees, specially in the aspects of providing background information for cooperation, technical support, seeking funding and participating in other required areas.

15. We shall seek to forge stronger links with development partners and international organizations, including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the UNDP.
16. We urge member countries to take advantage of the advances in information technology

in coordinating the work of BIMST-EC through *inter alia* virtual conferencing and the internet. We welcome the offer of India to establish a BIMST-EC Net for facilitating virtual interaction.
17. We agree that on assumption of Chair, a member state would provide secretarial support for co-ordination of BIMST-EC activities till the end of the Chair's tenure. Upon assuming chairmanship that member country will also chair the Working Group meetings. We express our profound appreciation to Thailand for having assumed the Chairmanship of the Working Group and provided valuable secretarial services to BIMST-EC since its inception.
18. We reiterate our faith in the importance of Asian solidarity, enhancing South-South cooperation among developing countries in the face of opportunities and challenges that are being presented by globalization and liberalization of the international trade and financial systems.
19. We reaffirm our belief in the need to coordinate our positions and policies on major issues relating to international flows of goods, services and capital within the framework of international institutions such as the World Trade Organization and others.
20. In addressing the future directions of BIMST-EC, we resolve to :
 - i) Fully exploit the complementarities within our region;
 - ii) Exert combined political will for the success of the Organization;
 - iii) Ensure that each of us individually is able to reap adequate benefits from

BIMST-EC cooperation, with special attention to those at lower stages of development.
 - iv) Develop short, medium and long term plans and strategies and to implement them in a systematic and coordinated manner;
 - v) Act as a bridge between the South Asian and South East Asian Regions;
 - vi) Aim and strive to develop BIMST-EC into a free trade arrangement and to focus on activities that facilitate trade, increase investment and promote technical cooperation among member States.
 - vii) Foster South-South cooperation and help in our equitable and beneficial integration into the global economy;

- viii) Act as a vehicle for making the international economic and trading system more favourable to developing countries.
- ix) Remove constraints and facilitate trade in goods and services and in people to people contacts;
- x) Vigorously pursue sub-regional energy cooperation; and
- xi) Work towards transport and communication network and linkages.

21. We look forward to the next Ministerial Meeting of BIMST-EC which would be held in New Delhi, India in the last quarter of 1999.

22. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to Bangladesh for the warm hospitality extended to us and for the excellent arrangements made for the Meeting.