

THE THIRD BIMST-EC MINISTERIAL MEETING

NEW DELHI

6 JULY 2000

JOINT STATEMENT OF THE BIMIST-EC MINISTERIAL MEETING

The Third BIMST-EC Ministerial Meeting was held in New Delhi on 6 July 2000.

The Ministerial Meeting was attended by H.E. Mr Abul Hasan Chowdhury, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, H.E. Mr Ajit Kumar Panja, Minister of State for External Affairs, Government of India, H.E. U Tin Latt, Ambassador of the Union of Myanmar to India, 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.

Nepal attended the Meeting as an Observer.

At the commencement of the Meeting, H.E. Mr Abul Hasan Chowdhury, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh invited H.E. Mr Ajit Kumar Panja, Minister of State for External Affairs, Government of India, to assume Chairmanship of BIMST-EC. This was unanimously agreed to.

H.E. Mr Jaswant Singh, the Minister of External Affairs, Government of India, inaugurated the Third Ministerial Meeting of BIMST-EC, and spoke of the age-old ties among the countries of BIMST-EC, and of the promise that cooperation holds for the improvement of the lives of our peoples. He emphasized that BIMST-EC must work to move from promise to the delivery of real economic benefits to the people of the region.

The Ministers considered and took note of the report of the BIMST-EC Economic Forum which had met on 3 July 2000, and endorsed the recommendations of the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM), which had met on 4-5 July 2000.

At the conclusion of their Meeting, the Leaders of Delegation issued the following statement:

1. We note that the global economy is now on a path of recovery after the financial crisis. Therefore, it is the right time to provide momentum to BIMST-EC by enhancing economic, commercial and technical cooperation among the Member Countries, both at the Government and private sector levels.
2. We welcome the participation of Nepal in this Meeting as an Observer.
3. We note that the Second Meeting of BIMST-EC Trade and Economic Ministers was held in New Delhi in April 2000 and welcome the inputs provided by their deliberations towards our regional cooperation in trade and investment. We recognize the significance of their discussions pertaining to trade facilitation and investment promotion, which were also taken up at the First Meeting of the Sectoral Committee on Trade and Investment.

4. We are happy to note that the private sector is taking keen interest in pursuing business opportunities and developing linkages in the region under the auspices of the BIMST-EC Business Forum comprising representatives of national / designated chambers of commerce and industry of Member Countries.
5. We note that the preparatory meeting on the formation of the BIMST-EC Economic Forum was held in Dhaka in November 1999, and that the Economic Forum met formally for the first time in New Delhi on 3rd July 2000. We urge the Economic Forum to meet immediately before the BIMST-EC Senior Officials and Ministerial Meetings so as to provide inputs to the latter on promoting private sector-government interaction to help achieve the aims and objectives of the BIMST-EC.
6. We welcome the recommendations of the Economic Forum relating to trade facilitation both in the context of establishment of a Free Trade Area (FTA) in the future and / or a Preferential Trading Arrangement (PTA) in the intermediary stage. We also commend the proposal for setting up a joint BIMST-EC Chamber of Commerce.
7. The decisions of the SOM adopted by the grouping, and the recommendations of the Economic Forum, as appropriate, should be implemented by all countries expeditiously. The private sector in all the Member Countries should be encouraged to participate closely in this implementation process.
8. In order to facilitate effective monitoring and coordination of BIMST-EC activities, future SOM meetings may be held bi-annually, before the Ministerial meeting in February, and later as per mutual convenience of member countries during the same year. The BIMST-EC Working Group in Bangkok will coordinate matters in this regard.
9. We encourage that representatives of both the Foreign and Trade Ministers of member countries be included in the meetings of the Senior Officials and Senior Trade and Economic Officials in order to facilitate coordination between the BIMST-EC Ministerial Meeting and the Trade and Economic Ministers' Meeting.
10. We agree to strengthen and rationalize the institutional mechanisms of BIMST-EC, and to evolve necessary guidelines and organizational rules in respect of all BIMST-EC fora, so as to better streamline and co-ordinate BIMST-EC activities.
11. With a view to further strengthening the BIMST-EC institutional mechanisms and ensuring regularity in the schedule of Ministerial Meetings for the effective implementation of the Bangkok Declaration, we agree that future annual Ministerial Meetings should be held in the month of February each year.
12. We stress that besides tangible ongoing regional cooperation initiatives, BIMST-EC should also focus on the 'software' aspects of such cooperation. In order to facilitate this process, we urge that the grouping, as a first step, expeditiously initiate efforts to compile rules and regulations, particularly in the areas of transport and communications and tourism. We welcome the offer of India to undertake this compilation.
13. We appreciate the progress made in the six sectors identified so far for cooperation under BIMST-EC. We believe that the Action Plans identified under each sector and sub-sector have to be monitored for early implementation. We urge that any pending action pertaining to identified areas of cooperation be completed at the earliest. Keeping in view the importance of disaster management and agriculture to member countries, we recognize that these sectors be also included in the work programme of the grouping at a future point in time.

14. We reaffirm the importance of 'Visit BIMST-EC Tourism Year 2001' and urge the member countries to raise the profile of this region by considering measures such as joint marketing strategies and promotional efforts including through pooling of airline resources. In order to encourage intra-regional travel, member countries could also consider agreeing to special airfare and other promotional arrangements.
15. We commend the work done by various Sectoral Committee meetings in areas such as Trade and Investment, Tourism and Energy. We also recognize the potential of building closer commercial linkages in the region by considering early implementation of the Action Plans recommended by the three Sectoral Committees and sub-sectoral expert group meetings on Textiles and Clothing, Drugs and Pharmaceutical Products, Gems and Jewellery, and Processed Foods.
16. In the Fisheries, Technology and the Transport and Communications Sectors, already identified for cooperation under BIMST-EC, we urge that the Sectoral Committees meet as soon as possible to identify areas of cooperation and draw up the related plans of action.
17. We reaffirm the critical role which cooperation in the Energy Sector can play in the future development of the region. In this context, BIMST-EC countries should enhance cooperation in such areas as sharing energy-related information and data, sharing of technology and expertise, and cooperation in energy-development programmes. We should also identify possible sources of support for these cooperative activities.
18. We recommend that the enhancement of awareness about BIMST-EC be intensified to involve people from all circles in order to strengthen the spirit of BIMST-EC cooperation and to elevate BIMST-EC's profile in international fora.
19. We acknowledge with appreciation the contribution of ESCAP to BIMST-EC's ongoing programme of cooperation. We also recognize the constraints posed by availability of limited resources to regional cooperation. We therefore, reiterate the need to foster networking arrangements and stronger links with development partners and donors, relevant international organizations and the private sector, in order to provide impetus to BIMST-EC's current and proposed regional cooperation activities.
20. We recognize that the twin processes of globalization and trade liberalization bring new opportunities and challenges for countries of the BIMST-EC. In order to better harness the potential benefits arising from such developments and at the same time to overcome the adverse effects of such global trends of common concern to developing countries, member countries need to cooperate and coordinate their efforts for addressing these issues at relevant regional and international fora.
21. In realizing the primary objective of BIMST-EC to promote economic cooperation in the region and facilitate trade and investment opportunities, the threat posed by terrorism to peace, stability and economic development was discussed, and the need for cooperation to address this problem expressed.
22. We would like to express sincere appreciation to India for the warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements made for the meeting.
23. We welcome the offer by Myanmar to convene the Fourth BIMST-EC Ministerial Meeting in Yangon in February 2001.

