

## THE FOURTH BIMST-EC MINISTERIAL MEETING

### YANGOON

21 DECEMBER 2001

#### JOINT STATEMENT OF THE BIMST-EC MINISTERIAL MEETING

The Fourth BIMST-EC Ministerial Meeting was held in Yangon on 21 December 2001.

The Ministerial Meeting was attended by H.E. Mr. Reaz Rahman, Hon'ble Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, H.E. Mr. Rajeev Pratap Rudy, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, Government of India, H.E. U Khin Maung Win, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of the Union of Myanmar, H.E. Mr Lal Dharmapriya Gamage, Minister Assisting Foreign Affairs, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and H.E. Dr. Pracha Guna-Kasem, Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Kingdom of Thailand, and their respective delegations.

Nepal attended the Meeting as an Observer.

At the commencement of the Meeting, H.E. Mr. Rajeev Pratap Rudy, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, Government of India, invited H.E. U Khin Maung Win, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of the Union of Myanmar, to assume Chairmanship of BIMST-EC. This was unanimously agreed to.

H.E. U Win Aung, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of the Union of Myanmar, inaugurated the Fourth Ministerial Meeting of BIMST-EC, and stressed that shared ideals for peace, freedom and economic well-being can be best attained by fostering greater understanding, good neighbourliness and meaningful cooperation among the countries of the sub-region. He also highlighted that the core principles of respect for sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit should serve as basic guidelines for cooperation within the BIMST-EC countries.

The Ministers endorsed the report of the Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) which had met on 19 – 20 December 2001.

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

1. We are of the view that the time is now opportune for Member Countries to strengthen their cooperation and inject greater dynamism into the BIMST-EC process.
2. We feel that the Ministerial Meetings of BIMST-EC should be held at full Ministerial level commencing from the next meeting so as to reflect our strong commitment to the BIMST-EC process, and to give BIMST-EC cooperation further momentum.
3. We note with concern that the global economic slowdown has reached every corner of the world, including the BIMST-EC Member Countries. There is a clear need for BIMST-EC to redouble their efforts to further enhance economic, commercial and technical cooperation among the Member Countries, both at the government and private sector levels.

4. We welcome the participation of the Kingdom of Nepal in this Meeting as an Observer and take note of the request by Nepal for membership to BIMST-EC, keeping in mind the moratorium on further expansion of membership until end of 2002 and criteria to be evolved on BIMST-EC membership.
5. We take note of the deliberations of the Third Meeting of BIMST-EC Trade/Economic Ministers, held in Yangon on February 14, 2001. We welcome the setting up of Group of Experts to examine the different approaches to the establishment of a BIMST-EC Free Trade Area.
6. We note with appreciation the offer of Sri Lanka to host the next meeting of BIMST-EC Trade/Economic Ministers in 2002.
7. We believe that active participation by the private sector in BIMST-EC activities is crucial to the attainment of our collective objectives and, in this context, stress the importance of strengthening the linkages with an among Chambers of Commerce and Industry through the BIMST-EC Business Forum. In this regard, we affirm the need for the Business Forum to be convened with the next meeting of BIMST-EC Trade/Economic Ministers. We also affirm the need for active involvement of the private sector in the implementation of BIMST-EC decisions.
8. We reiterate the importance of the BIMST-EC Economic Forum and urge its convening back-to-back with the BIMST-EC Senior Officials' Meetings 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.
9. 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 reaffirm the decision that future annual Ministerial Meetings should be held in the month of February each year. However, it was agreed that the next Ministerial Meeting will be held in December 2002, and thereafter, in February 2004.
10. In order to facilitate effective monitoring and coordination of BIMST-EC activities, we reaffirm the decision that future SOM meetings may be held bi-annually, before the Ministerial Meetings in February, and later as per mutual convenience of Member Countries during the same year.
11. We are encouraged at the progress made in the six sectors i.e. Trade and Investment, Technology, Transportation and Communication, Energy, Tourism and Fisheries identified for cooperation under BIMST-EC. Respective Action Plans identified under each sector and sub-sector have to be monitored for early implementation. In this regard, we urge that any pending action pertaining to identified areas of cooperation be taken up expeditiously.
12. Visit BIMST-EC Year which was earlier planned for the year 2001 will now be observed in 2003 in order to allow concerned authorities and agencies to coordinate their efforts and work out an effective strategy to successfully launch and observe the year. We recognize that marketing is an important component of efforts needed to promote tourism and therefore decide to establish a BIMST-EC marketing task force on tourism.
13. We recognize that globalization presents both opportunities and challenges. Many developing countries, particularly the least developed among them are, being threatened with the danger of further marginalization. We affirm that to take optimum

advantage, at the sub-regional level, of globalization, cooperation between BIMST-EC Member Countries should be enhanced, especially in capacity building. BIMST-EC countries should also strengthen cooperation in the consideration of globalization-related issues at the relevant regional and international fora.

14. We discussed the need for the setting up of a permanent secretariat for BIMST-EC and tasked the Working Group in Bangkok to prepare a paper on the subject for consideration by the next Senior Officials' Meeting. In the meantime, we agreed to further strengthen the Working Group to provide ongoing support to BIMST-EC.
15. We recognize the importance of having financial resources for the implementation of BIMST-EC projects. In this regard, we entrust the Working Group in Bangkok to short-list projects and explore possibilities for potential external funding, and submit its recommendations to the next SOM for consideration. We acknowledge with appreciation the contribution of ESCAP to BIMST-EC's ongoing programme of cooperation.
16. We endorsed India's offer to request the Research and Information System for Non-Aligned and other Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi, to develop, in consultation with Think Tanks and other relevant institutions in BIMST-EC countries, ideas on the future direction and priorities for cooperation under BIMST-EC, for the consideration of relevant BIMST-EC organs. Such inputs from the academic community would be seminal to the enhancement of BIMST-EC cooperation.
17. In order to project and highlight the identity and the activities of BIMST-EC, we agreed to adopt the BIMST-EC Logo and consolidate BIMST-EC website.
18. We appreciate the offers by Member Countries as contained in the Report of the SOM, to act as Lead countries in the identified sectors for cooperation and Coordinating Countries in sub-sectoral cooperation. We request the Member Countries to propose through the Working Group in Bangkok, within 8 weeks, possible dates for the convening of the related expert group meetings in order to facilitate a calendar of events to be evolved for better coordination.
19. We continue to recognize the threat posed by terrorism to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries, their economic growth and development, and international peace and security. The expanding linkage of terrorism to illegal fund raising, narco and human trafficking and the illicit arms trade is of particular concern. Since this problem has to be addressed to facilitate economic and social progress, we call upon the international community to further intensify its efforts to comprehensively combat terrorism in all its dimension and forms. On our part, we reiterate our resolve to support the international consensus and abide by the relevant international legal instruments against terrorism.
20. We would like to express sincere appreciation to Myanmar for the warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements made for the meeting.
21. We welcome the offer by Sri Lanka to convene the Fifth BIMST-EC Ministerial Meeting in Colombo in December 2002.