



Joint Statement of the Tenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting New Delhi, 29 August 2008

The Tenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was held in New Delhi, India on 29 August, 2008.

The meeting was attended by H.E. Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Adviser for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, H.E. Lyonpo Ugyen Tshering, Minister for Foreign Affairs, of the Kingdom of Bhutan, H.E. Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, External Affairs Minister of the Republic of India, H.E. U Nyan Win, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Union of Myanmar, H.E. Mr. Upendra Yadav, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, H.E. Mr. Rohitha Bogollagama, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and H.E. Mr. Tej Bunnag, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand.

H.E. Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, External Affairs Minister of India chaired the Meeting.

The Meeting approved the Report of the Twelfth Meeting of the Senior Officials held on 28 August 2008.

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

We, the Heads of Delegation of the Tenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, having gathered in New Delhi on 29th August, 2008 reiterated our commitment to the founding objectives and principles of BIMSTEC to accelerate economic and social growth in the region and noted with satisfaction the progress made since our last Meeting in New Delhi in August 2006.

We considered it opportune to review activities in the regional cooperation grouping, with BIMSTEC having crossed the landmark of its 10th Anniversary last year. We reviewed the progress made in the various sectors and noted with satisfaction the achievements since the last Meeting.

We reiterated our agreement to pursue cooperation in the following 13 areas identified under the BIMSTEC framework:

Trade and Investment

We reaffirmed the importance of realizing a BIMSTEC Free Trade Area for increasing

trade and investment, enhancing competitiveness and promoting socio-economic development of BIMSTEC countries. We noted with satisfaction the progress made at meetings of the Trade Negotiating Committee. We reiterated our resolve to conclude the negotiations on trade in goods under the proposed FTA at an early date, preferably before the next BIMSTEC Summit.

We noted the progress made at the Experts Group meetings on the BIMSTEC Business Visa Scheme as well as the BIMSTEC Business & Economic Forum during the last two years since the 9th Ministerial Meeting.

Transport and Communication

We reaffirmed that optimal transport linkages are necessary for achieving efficient levels in connectivity amongst member countries to promote movement of goods and people. Accordingly, we recognized the need for development of key infrastructure, including transportation and communication linkages. In this context, we noted with satisfaction the progress made since our last meeting. We complimented the Asian Development Bank which has concluded the mandated study on BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics (BTILS). We noted BTILS including the proposed institutional mechanisms and the terms of reference which are being examined by BIMSTEC member countries.

Tourism

We recalled our earlier decision that tourism should be actively encouraged, both intra-BIMSTEC cooperation among member countries as well as from outside the BIMSTEC region. In this context, we expressed satisfaction that considerable progress had been made since our last meeting. We welcomed the 2nd Round Table and Workshop of Tourism Ministers held in Kathmandu in August 2006 and endorsed the Kathmandu Declaration and the Plan of Action for taking forward tourism related activities in the BIMSTEC framework. We decided to constitute a Tourism Working Group to implement tourism programmes and follow up on the Plan of Action. We welcomed the establishment of the BIMSTEC Information Centre in New Delhi for promoting tourism.

Energy Cooperation

We reemphasized the importance of sharing experiences and strengthening cooperation amongst member countries in the fields of grid connectivity, gas pipelines, hydro power, renewable sources of energy, energy efficiency and energy sector reforms, restructuring, regulations and best practices with a view to promoting energy security in the BIMSTEC region. In this context, we welcomed the BIMSTEC meetings and activities during the last two years, and particularly the progress made in realizing the BIMSTEC Energy Centre in India. We approved the Memorandum of Association (MoA) for setting up the BIMSTEC Energy Centre in India and recommended the MoA for signing during the forthcoming BIMSTEC Summit. We expressed the hope that the Energy Centre would be operational as soon as possible.

Technology

We reiterated the need to enhance cooperation in advanced areas of fundamental and applied scientific and technological research. We welcomed the progress made since our last meeting including regarding the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Exchange Facility and expressed the hope that the facility would be realized as soon as possible.

We appreciated the progress in the sector including the decision to establish the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate. We approved the Memorandum of Association (MoA) for setting up a BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate in India and recommended the MOA for signing during the next BIMSTEC Summit.

Fisheries

We reiterated our commitment to continue our efforts to promote the sustainable use of marine resources through effective conservation and management of the resources in the Bay of Bengal in close coordination with existing frameworks. We welcomed the progress in terms of the Workshop and Joint Survey undertaken during 2007.

Poverty Alleviation

We welcomed the progress made particularly at the first Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation held in Dhaka in July 2008 and noted the observations of the Ministerial meeting. We focused on poverty alleviation in the context of ensuring food security in the BIMSTEC region. We noted the proposal of Nepal to prepare a Plan of Action on Poverty Alleviation to be submitted to the second BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation to be held in Nepal in 2009. We noted with appreciation the proposal of Bangladesh to host BIMSTEC Poverty Alleviation Centre in Dhaka.

Culture

We recalled the Paro Initiative and Plan of Action adopted at the First BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Cultural Cooperation held in Bhutan in May 2006. We welcomed the finalization of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the establishment of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO) and BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) as the institutional mechanisms to facilitate cooperation in the area of culture. We recommended that the approved MoU be signed during the Second BIMSTEC Summit.

Agriculture

We welcomed the progress made during meetings held in the last two years and the wide array of cooperation activities and projects identified at the Expert Group meetings along with lead coordinating country for each. We expressed the hope that these concrete activities and projects would be implemented expeditiously. We felt the need to address the issues relating to agricultural productivity in this regard.

Counter-Terrorism & Trans National Crimes

We welcomed and accepted the offer of India to be the lead country. We reiterated the significance of the work done in the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism & Transnational Crimes and its four sub-groups covering Intelligence Sharing; Legal and Law Enforcement Issues; Combating the Financing of Terrorism and Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursor Chemicals. We expressed the hope that the draft BIMSTEC Convention be finalized as soon as possible for signing during the next BIMSTEC Summit.

Environment & Disaster Management

We welcomed the Workshops organised since our last meeting and endorsed the Agenda for Action for effective regional cooperation among BIMSTEC countries prepared by the Workshop on Disaster Risk Reduction and Management in October 2006.

Public Health

We welcomed initiatives to host the BIMSTEC meeting on Traditional Medicine and Generic Drugs for the poor and to organise a study visit regarding Avian Influenza Pandemic. We appreciated India's ongoing programme offering 30 'Ayush' scholarships to BIMSTEC students to study traditional medicine.

People-to-People Contacts

We expressed appreciation for initiatives to organise various events and activities including to mark the 10th Anniversary of BIMSTEC in Thailand last year to promote people-to-people contacts and interaction among member countries.

We the Heads of Delegation of the BIMSTEC tenth Ministerial Meeting, on the recommendation of the 12th BIMSTEC Senior Officials Meeting, approved the following:

- (a) The Memorandum of Association of the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate in India
- (b) The Memorandum of Association of the BIMSTEC Energy Centre in India
- (c) The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), of BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) and BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO)
- (d) The setting up of Tourism Working Group and its Terms of Reference (ToRs), and
- (e) The setting up of a BIMSTEC Joint Working Group to consider: (i) all aspects

including organisational structure, financing mechanism and staffing, pertaining to the BIMSTEC Secretariat, and thereafter (ii) operational structure and financing of BIMSTEC Centres.

Further, we the Heads of Delegation of the tenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting agreed to the following:

BIMSTEC Centre

We also thanked Thailand for its continued contribution to the BIMSTEC Centre particularly its decision to extend the contract of the BIMSTEC Centre for another year.

BIMSTEC Official Website

We expressed satisfaction on the improvements made to the BIMSTEC website www.bimstec.org maintained by Sri Lanka in coordination with BIMSTEC Centre in Bangkok and BWG.

BIMSTEC Summit

We noted with satisfaction BIMSTEC achievements thus far and reaffirmed our commitments to further deepening our partnership within the BIMSTEC framework. We expressed confidence that the 2nd BIMSTEC Summit to be hosted by India in November 2008 will carry forward our cooperation activities with renewed dynamism. The 2nd BIMSTEC Summit will also provide an opportunity to review the achievements since the establishment of BIMSTEC which as a regional cooperation and integration grouping celebrated its 10th Anniversary last year. It will also provide further impetus to BIMSTEC cooperation activities and projects.

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The Eleventh BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting will be held in India in November 2008.