

**Joint Statement of the Thirteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting
Nay Pyi Taw, 22 January 2011**

The 13th Ministerial Meeting of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 22 January 2011.

The Meeting was attended by H.E. Dr. Dipu Moni, M.P., Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, H.E. Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba, Minister-in-Charge, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bhutan, H.E. Mrs. Preneet Kaur, Minister of State for External Affairs of the Republic of India, H.E. U Nyan Win, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Union of Myanmar, H.E. Ms. Gunalaxmi Sharma Bishwokarma, Ambassador of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal to Myanmar, H.E. Mr. Neomal Perera, M.P., Deputy Minister of External Affairs of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and H.E. Mr. Kasit Piromya, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand. The Meeting was chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Union of Myanmar.

His Excellency U Thein Sein, Honourable Prime Minister of the Government of the Union of Myanmar addressed the Opening Session.

The Meeting considered and approved the Report of the 15th Meeting of the Senior Officials held on 21 January 2011.

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

We, the Heads of Delegation to the Thirteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, having gathered in Nay Pyi Taw on 22 January 2011, 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 we last met.

We welcomed the signing of the Memorandum of Association among the BIMSTEC Members for Establishment of BIMSTEC Energy Centre.

We reviewed and agreed to enhance the ongoing progress in the following priority areas of cooperation in BIMSTEC.

Trade and Investment

We once again reaffirmed the importance of the BIMSTEC FTA in promoting trade and investment in a mutually beneficial manner for all Member Countries, as well as enhancing competitiveness and socio-economic development in the BIMSTEC region. We also emphasized the crucial role that the private sector can play in driving our economic cooperation in BIMSTEC.

We welcomed Thailand's kind offer to host the Sixth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Business Forum, the Sixth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Economic Forum and the 19th Meeting of the BIMSTEC TNC.

We urged for early completion of the negotiations on the Agreement on Trade in Goods and acceleration of negotiations on the Agreement on Trade in Services and Investment.

We further welcomed the offer of Bangladesh to hold BIMSTEC Trade / Economic Ministers' Meeting in 2011 to take stock of developments and to identify challenges and possible responses for the solution.

Transport and Communications

We noted with satisfaction the follow-up progress being made with activities such as uploading the BTILS Report on ADB website as well as publishing the hard copies of the reports. We also noted that the five sub-sectors are identified for Technical Expert Groups to be set up for further detailed discussions. We called upon the Technical Expert Groups to meet early and work out the road map for implementing the recommendations of the BTILS Report.

We expressed our appreciation to the BIMSTEC Working Group in Bangkok for liaising with the ADB to initiate further steps with regard to the implementation of the recommendations of the study. The draft Terms of References (TORs) prepared by ADB are being examined by the Member Countries.

We acknowledged with appreciation Thailand's offer of training course on Road Construction and Maintenance and training course on Bridge Engineering. We also welcomed India's offer to conduct training programmes on highways and ports.

Tourism

With the finalization of the Terms of Reference (TOR) and the establishment of the BIMSTEC Tourism Working Group, we look forward to the first meeting of the Group to be held in India.

We expressed our confidence that the joint promotion and marketing of tourism destinations will promote the tourism industries in the Member Countries. It will also provide opportunities to work together to minimize the negative impact of tourism on environment, cultural heritage and local communities while maximizing the benefits of tourism in promoting sustainable development, including poverty alleviation.

We urged all Member Countries to effect their contribution to the Tourism Fund and to provide their publicity material to the BIMSTEC Information Centre for effective utilization of the Information Centre.

Energy

We welcomed the Joint Ministerial Statement of "the Second BIMSTEC Ministers on Energy's Meeting" held in Bangkok in March 2010 and noted the decisions taken to hold the Energy SOM once a year and Ministerial Meeting every two years.

We reiterated our agreement to promote utilization of natural gas as clean energy source for Member Countries in order to lessen dependence on imported oil and also noted that import and export of natural gas among BIMSTEC Member Countries could be an important element of our energy security policy and called for more cooperation among the Member Countries to promote governmental and private investment in natural gas infrastructure.

We welcomed the offer of Bangladesh to host the Third Meeting of the Task Force on Trans-Power Exchange in 2011. We appreciated Nepal's offer to host the 3rd Meeting of the BIMSTEC Ministers of Energy in 2012.

We noted with appreciation India's offer to host the next meeting of the Senior Officials on Energy in February 2011 and directed the Senior Officials on Energy to expedite the modalities for setting up the BIMSTEC Energy Centre.

Technology

We recognized the importance of science and technology for development and agreed to enhance the technology base of the Member Countries through collaboration and partnership in micro, small and medium scale enterprises.

We noted with appreciation the revised Concept Paper circulated by Sri Lanka for the establishment of the Centre/Facility to promote enhanced cooperation in advance areas of fundamental and applied scientific and technological research among the Member Countries.

We welcomed Sri Lanka's offer to host the 3rd Expert Group Meeting on Science and Technology in April 2011.

Fisheries

We reaffirmed our commitment to continue cooperation for the sustainable use of marine resources through effective conservation and management of resources in the Bay of Bengal. Recognizing the importance of effective management of inland fisheries resources, we included the inland fisheries in the scope of cooperation for BIMSTEC to enhance cooperation in the area.

We expressed appreciation to Thailand for conducting the BIMSTEC International Training Program on Ornamental Aquatic Plants Propagation from 1-28 August 2010 with participants from BIMSTEC Member Countries.

Poverty Alleviation

We recognized that poverty is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon that goes beyond income poverty. We, therefore, welcomed BIMSTEC's initiative to devise comprehensive strategies to address poverty in the draft Poverty Plan of Action (PPA) circulated by Nepal.

We welcomed the proposed convening of the 2nd BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation in Nepal in the first half of 2011.

Cultural Cooperation

We look forward to the early signing of the MoU on the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) and BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO) by the Member Countries.

We recognized that the signing and implementation of the BCIC and BCIO would promote development of cultural industries and in turn would gain the twin benefit of community vitalization, poverty reduction for socio-economic progress and cultural development as enunciated in the Paro Initiative.

Agriculture

We noted with appreciation the progress made during the 3rd Expert Group Meeting held in Sri Lanka. We were cognizant of the necessity to address the issues relating to agricultural productivity, post harvest technologies and management, and competitiveness in the region. In addition, we took note of considering the importance of further collaboration in research and development, technology transfer and private sector participation among the Member Countries. We expressed our hope that these concrete activities and projects would be implemented expeditiously.

We welcomed Nepal's offer to host the 4th Expert Group Meeting on Agriculture Cooperation.

Counter-Terrorism & Transnational Crime

We welcomed the signing of the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking by the Member Countries during the 12th Ministerial Meeting in 2009 in Nay Pyi Taw, which reflects the resolve of our Governments and peoples to combat the menace posed by terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking.

We also urged all the Member Countries to conclude ratification formalities of the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking early.

We reiterated the significance of the work done in the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime 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 welcomed Nepal's offer to host the 5th Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime.

We agreed that the Sub-Group on Legal and Law Enforcement Issues should begin negotiations on the draft of the Agreement for Mutual Legal Assistance on Criminal Matters.

We welcomed India's offer to host the Meeting of the Sub-Group on Legal and Law Enforcement Issues in March 2011.

Environment & Disaster Management

We recognized that the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate, to be established in India, would be an effective mechanism in promoting regional cooperation on disaster risk reduction and management among BIMSTEC Member Countries and agreed to expedite the signing of the Memorandum of Association on the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate.

We welcomed India's offer to conduct workshop / training programmes on Seasonal Prediction & Application to Society and on Climate Change and Disasters.

Public Health

We commended the efforts in enhancing cooperation in the area of traditional medicine and appreciated Thailand for hosting the 2nd BIMSTEC Meeting on the Network of National Centres of Coordination in Traditional Medicine in 2010. Taking note of successful deliberations at the meeting, we urged Member Countries to expedite the follow-up of the four areas of cooperation as agreed upon at the meeting.

We took note with appreciation Thailand's continued support in capacity building in public health.

We also took note with appreciation India's initiative on capacity building by granting AYUSH scholarships to the nationals of BIMSTEC Member Countries to study traditional

medicine in India and welcomed the offer to conduct a workshop cum training programme on IPR issues in Traditional Medicine.

We welcomed Sri Lanka's offer to invite experts from the BIMSTEC Member Countries to the Symposium on Traditional Medicine to be held in Sri Lanka in July, 2011.

People-to-People Contact

We expressed our appreciation to India for setting up a BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks and organizing the 1st Meeting of BIMSTEC Network of Think Tanks. We noted the Report of the deliberations of the 1st Meeting and recommended the dialogue process to continue.

We also expressed our appreciation to Thailand for hosting the 12th BIMSTEC Anniversary Celebration to promote people-to-people contact and interaction among Member Countries.

We urged Member Countries to promote exchange of TV programmes, films, exchange of media visits, photos and book fairs, and organize BIMSTEC film festivals.

Establishment of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat

We agreed that the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat shall be located in Dhaka, Bangladesh and that the first Secretary General of BIMSTEC shall be nominated by Sri Lanka.

BIMSTEC Centre

We appreciated the contribution of Thailand in supporting the BIMSTEC Centre in Bangkok from 2004 to 2010.

Cooperation with External Development Partners

We noted Thailand's suggestion to seek the enhanced involvement of multilateral development partners, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and UNESCAP in BIMSTEC.

BIMSTEC Summit

We noted with satisfaction BIMSTEC achievements and welcomed Myanmar's offer to host the 3rd BIMSTEC Summit in 2011.

We also welcomed Myanmar's offer to host the 14th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting and 16th Senior Officials' Meeting in 2011 preceding the 3rd Summit.

Next Chairmanship of BIMSTEC

We welcomed the kind offer of Nepal to assume the next BIMSTEC Chairmanship.

We endorsed the recommendation of SOM that the Chairmanship, henceforth, will rotate in alphabetical order.

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