

Document Number: BIMSTEC/MM/15/2017/05
Distribution: Restricted
Date: 11 August 2017



**SECRETARIAT
BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL
TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION
DHAKA**

**JOINT STATEMENT OF THE FIFTEENTH BIMSTEC
MINISTERIAL MEETING
11 August 2017
Kathmandu, Nepal**

The Fifteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was convened in Kathmandu, Nepal on 10-11 August 2017.

The Fifteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was attended by His Excellency Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, M.P., Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh; His Excellency Lyonpo Damcho Dorji, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Royal Government of Bhutan; Her Excellency Smt. Sushma Swaraj, External Affairs Minister of the Government of the Republic of India; His Excellency Mr. Kyaw Tin, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar; His Excellency Mr. Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of Nepal; His Excellency Mr. Vasantha Senanayake, State Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and His Excellency Mr. Virasakdi Futrakul, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand and their respective delegations.

The Right Honourable Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba, Prime Minister of Nepal, inaugurated the Meeting. In his inaugural address, the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister underlined the need for concerted efforts in order to advance deeper regional cooperation in the BIMSTEC region.

The Ministers also called on the Rt. Hon. Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba, the Prime Minister of the Government of Nepal.

The Honourable Mr. Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal, chaired the Meeting.

The Meeting considered and approved the Reports of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Sessions of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meetings held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 07 February 2017 and 10 August 2017 respectively.

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

We recall the 1997 Bangkok Declaration establishing BIMSTEC and agree to intensify our collaborative efforts to realise the aims and purposes of BIMSTEC embodied therein and pledge to make BIMSTEC stronger, more effective and result oriented.

We note the progress made by BIMSTEC since we last met in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 03 March 2014.

We express our deep gratitude to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh for hosting the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat in Dhaka and also providing the required logistical support to the Secretariat.

We further express our deep gratitude to the Government of the Republic of India for hosting the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat in Goa, India on 16 October 2016.

We reaffirm our commitment to intensify our efforts to realise the directives outlined and the Agenda of Action as agreed by the Leaders during the Goa Retreat.

We agree on the following:

I. TRADE AND INVESTMENT

- (i) **We emphasize** the need for greater cooperation in trade and investment in order to deepen regional integration in the Bay of Bengal region. We recognize the paramount importance of early conclusion of BIMSTEC Free Trade Area and direct the Trade Negotiating Committee and Working Groups to expedite the finalization of its constituent Agreements.
- (ii) **We stress** on the need to expedite the negotiations on the Agreements on Services and Investment to augment economic cooperation in the region.
- (iii) **We underscore** the importance of trade facilitation in our region and urge authorities for early finalization of the BIMSTEC Trade Facilitation Agreement. **We welcome** the offer of Bangladesh to host the first Meeting of the Working Group to negotiate the Trade Facilitation Agreement. **We also welcome** the offer of Bangladesh to host the Sixth Trade and Economic Ministers' Meeting and the Eighth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Business Forum in 2017.

- (iv) **We underline** the necessity of early finalization of the BIMSTEC Agreement on Mutual Assistance on Customs Matters.

II. CLIMATE CHANGE

- (i) **We note** with great concern of the increasing threat to our planet and livelihoods of the people from climate change and agree to combat the same at local, national and regional levels. **We also commit** to implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.
- (ii) **We welcome** the offer of the Government of Bangladesh to convene the BIMSTEC Experts' Workshop on Climate Change in 2017.

III. ENERGY

- (i) **We note** with satisfaction that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection is ready for signature. **We agree** to complete the internal procedures to sign the MoU at the earliest.
- (ii) **We recognize** the high potentials of energy sources in the region, particularly renewable and clean energy sources and agree to expedite our efforts to develop a comprehensive plan for Energy Cooperation within the region. **We agree** to explore the possibilities of promoting energy trade in the region.
- (iii) **We welcome** the offer of the Government of Nepal to host the Third BIMSTEC Energy Ministers' Meeting in the early 2018.
- (iv) **We emphasize** on the early operationalization of the BIMSTEC Energy Centre in order to strengthen energy cooperation in the region in a comprehensive manner.

IV. AGRICULTURE

- (i) **We note** with satisfaction the progress made by the Expert Group on Agricultural Cooperation and urge the Member States to collectively implement the common projects identified for enhancing Agricultural Cooperation.
- (ii) **We recognize** the availability of vast plant biodiversity in the region and underscore the importance of enhancing cooperation in plant germplasm exchange and recommend to explore the possibility of

concluding a framework agreement on plant germplasm exchange and material transfer, taking into account the readiness and internal procedures of each Member State.

- (iii) **We endorse** the convening of the First BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture on a priority basis.

V. PUBLIC HEALTH

- (i) **We recognize** the importance of the public health care among the BIMSTEC Member States in holistic manner and the need to establish alliances for both traditional and non-traditional medicines.
- (ii) **We welcome** the offer of Bangladesh to host the Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of National Centers of Coordination in Traditional Medicine and the offer of India to host the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine (BTFTM).
- (iii) **We welcome** the launch of BIMSTEC Tele-medicine Network by JIPMER India to strengthen collaboration among premier medical institutions in the region.

VI. TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION

- (i) **We emphasize** that enhanced transport and communication is the key to regional integration and agree to expedite comments and observations on the BIMSTEC Framework Agreement on Transit, Transshipment and Movement of Vehicular Traffic (BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement) as well as the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement with a view to negotiate and conclude these at the earliest.
- (ii) **We take** note of Thailand's draft Concept Paper on BIMSTEC Master Plan for Connectivity and task the BTCWG to develop the draft Master Plan for further consideration.
- (iii) **We express** our appreciation to the Asian Development Bank for conducting the BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study and note the progress made so far in implementation of the recommendations of the Study as well as look forward to its successful implementation.

VII. TECHNOLOGY

- (i) **We recognize** the huge potentials and imperative for cooperation in Science and Technology and ICT sector among the Member States.
- (ii) **We recognize** the importance of access and availability of technology for promoting sustainable development and urge the authorities to expedite the conclusion of the Memorandum of Association on the establishment of the BIMSTEC Centre for Technology Transfer Facility in Sri Lanka.
- (iii) **We welcome** the offer of Sri Lanka to host the Fourth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on the establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Colombo in November 2017

VIII. POVERTY ALLEVIATION

- (i) **We recall** the BIMSTEC Poverty Plan of Action as adopted by the Second BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation in Nepal in 2012 and **reaffirm** our commitment to its effective implementation in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- (ii) **We welcome** the offer of Sri Lanka to host the Third BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation in December 2017 and also welcome the offer of Nepal to host an Expert level Meeting on 1 November 2017.
- (iii) **We welcome** the offer of Bangladesh to host a workshop to explore the interface between the Agenda 2030 and the BIMSTEC in December 2017.

IX. COUNTER-TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

- (i) **We reiterate** the strong commitment of our Leaders to combat terrorism, which remains the single most significant threat to peace and stability in our region, in all its forms and manifestations, and agree to take concrete measures to step up cooperation and coordination among our law enforcement, intelligence and security organisations. **We also agree** to expedite the ratification of the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking, signed in Myanmar on 11 December 2009 and also to complete the internal procedures to sign the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters at the earliest.

- (iii) **We note** with satisfaction that the Member States have commenced negotiations on BIMSTEC Convention Against Trafficking in Persons and urge early conclusion of the Convention.
- (iv) **We offer** our gratitude to the Government of India for hosting the First Annual Meeting of the National Security Chiefs in New Delhi on 21 March 2017. **We agree** to implement the recommendations of the Meeting to counter terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization; and deepen cooperation to deal with traditional and non-traditional security threats in a comprehensive manner.

X. PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONTACT

- (i) **We note** with satisfaction the conclusion of the Third Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks in Dhaka, on 22-23 April 2017 and urge authorities to implement the recommendations of the Meeting in order to intensify people-to-people contact at various levels. **We reiterate** our Leaders' commitment in strengthening linkages among the educational and research institutions in our region.
- (ii) **We express** our gratitude to the Government of Thailand for hosting the First International Conference on Strengthening Cultural Linkages in the Bay of Bengal region, as part of celebration of BIMSTEC's 20th anniversary, for deeper understanding among the people.
- (iii) **We note** with satisfaction that the Secretariat has organized two BIMSTEC Foundation Lectures and Ten Round-Table Meetings to promote the people-to-people contact among the Member States.

XI. FISHERIES

- (i) **We recall** the importance given by our Leaders on sustainable development of fisheries in making significant contribution towards ensuring food security and improving the livelihood of the people of our region and agree to constitute an Expert Group on Fisheries to prepare a plan of action.
- (ii) **We welcome** the offer from Thailand to organize a "Training Workshop on Inland Aquaculture and Small-scale Inland Aquaculture Promotion for Fisheries Officers/Biologist for the BIMSTEC/IORA Member Countries".

XII. TOURISM

- (i) **We agree** to constitute an *Ad-hoc* Expert Group to establish the BIMSTEC Buddhist Tourist Circuit and Temple Tourist Circuit in the region as encouraged by our Leaders during the Retreat.
- (ii) **We express** our gratitude to the Government of India for convening the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators in New Delhi on 07 July 2017 and agree to expeditiously implement recommendations of the Meeting.
- (iii) **We note** the establishment of BIMSTEC Tourism Fund by the Member States and welcome the offer of Bangladesh to host the Third BIMSTEC Tourism Ministers' Round-Table.

XIII. ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT

- (i) **We welcome** the offer of the Government of India to organize the First Annual BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise in October 2017.
- (ii) **We recall** the directives of our Leaders for closer and intensified cooperation in Disaster Management and agree to establish an Expert Group on Disaster Management.

XIV. CULTURE

- (i) **We agree** to expedite the establishment and operationalization of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) and BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO) in Bhutan as directed by our Leaders during the Retreat.
- (ii) **We welcome** the offer of the Government of Bangladesh to host the Second BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Culture preceded by a BIMSTEC Cultural Festival in 2017.

XV. BLUE ECONOMY and MOUNTAIN ECONOMY

- (i) **We recall** the directives of the Leaders during their Retreat to explore ways to deepen cooperation in areas of Blue Economy with the objective of holistic sustainable development of our region and agree to constitute a Working Group to determine the modalities in this regard.
- (ii) **We welcome** the offer of the Government of Bangladesh to host an International Conference on Blue Economy in October 2017.

- (iii) We welcome the offer of Nepal to host an Expert level Meeting on mountain economy in 2017.

XVI. BIMSTEC EMINENT PERSONS' GROUP

- (i) **We agree** for an early establishment of the BIMSTEC Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) to recommend a future roadmap for BIMSTEC Agenda for 2030.

We note with satisfaction the activities and commemorative events undertaken so far to celebrate the Twentieth Anniversary of the establishment of the BIMSTEC. **We reiterate** our commitment to undertake further activities to mark the 20th Anniversary of BIMSTEC.

We note the tasks undertaken by the Secretariat since its establishment in 2014 in conducting and facilitating various BIMSTEC Meetings and events including the First BIMSTEC Film Festival in Dhaka.

We express our appreciation to the First Secretary General of BIMSTEC, Mr. Sumith Nakandala, for his valuable contribution in the operationalization and functioning of the Secretariat.

We endorse the appointment of Ambassador M. Shahidul Islam of Bangladesh as the Second Secretary General of BIMSTEC with effect from 11 August 2017. However, to facilitate smooth handling and taking over, Ambassador M. Shahidul Islam will assume his responsibility on 14 September 2017 from the outgoing Secretary General Ambassador Mr. Sumith Nakandala.

We, the leaders of delegation of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand wish to express our profound appreciation to the Government of Nepal for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements made for the Meeting.

We look forward to meeting in Nepal for the Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting and the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit.
