



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

**JOINT STATEMENT OF THE NINETEENTH BIMSTEC  
MINISTERIAL MEETING  
09 MARCH 2023  
BANGKOK, THAILAND**

01. The Nineteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was held virtually in Bangkok, Thailand on 09 March 2023.

02. The Meeting was chaired by His Excellency Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, and attended by His Excellency Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen, M.P., Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh; His Excellency Dr. Tandi Dorji, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of the Royal Government of Bhutan; His Excellency Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs of the Government of the Republic of India; His Excellency U Kyaw Myo Htut, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar; His Excellency Mr. Bharat Raj Paudyal, Secretary, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Government of Nepal; Hon. Ali Sabry, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and their respective delegations.

03. His Excellency Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand inaugurated the Meeting. In his inaugural address, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs underlined the need to work more closely in areas of mutual benefit to promote sustainable development and resilience with a common BIMSTEC vision.

04. The Meeting considered and approved the Report of the Twenty Third Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting held virtually in Bangkok, Thailand on 08 March 2023.

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

05. *We recall* the purposes and objectives of BIMSTEC to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, technical and scientific fields and *agree* to work towards achieving the BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030 to build a prosperous, resilient and open BIMSTEC.

06. *We acknowledge* the extensive measures taken by the Member States in the post-COVID 19 recovery and rehabilitation process and *encourage* the Member States to continue cooperation to support one another, either through BIMSTEC framework or bilaterally, as appropriate.

07. *We note* with satisfaction the progress made by BIMSTEC since we last met in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 29 March 2022.

08. *We reaffirm* our commitment to intensify our efforts to realise the directives given by the Leaders during the previous BIMSTEC Summits.

## **INSTITUTION BUILDING**

09. *We request* the remaining Member States to ratify the BIMSTEC Charter before the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit.

10. *We endorse* the draft text of the BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030, and *recommend* it to the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit for adoption. The Bangkok Vision 2030 would serve as a common aspiration for a BIMSTEC region that is prosperous, resilient and open; a region that is well connected through physical linkages as well as through strong bonds of friendship and trust.

11. *We commend* the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPWC) for finalizing the Rules of Procedure for BIMSTEC Mechanisms including Rules of Procedure for Core BIMSTEC Mechanism, Rules of Procedure for Sectoral BIMSTEC Mechanism and Rules of Procedure for BIMSTEC's External Relations, and *recommend* them to the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit for adoption.

12. *We commend* the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPWC) for finalizing the Terms of Reference for Eminent Persons' Group on the Future Directions of BIMSTEC and *approve* the Terms of Reference.

13. *We approve* the "Administrative and Disciplinary Rules of the Secretariat" and amendment of the "Financial Rules and Regulations of the BIMSTEC Secretariat" for smooth operation and management of the Secretariat.

14. *We note* with appreciation the *ad hoc* financial contribution of one million USD by India for the operational budget of the BIMSTEC Secretariat in supporting of institution building, as agreed upon by the Member States.

## **SECTORAL ACTIVITIES**

15. *We recall* our decision to strengthen the role of Lead Countries in their respective sectors and *appreciate* the General Statement made on the progress of sectors by the respective Lead Countries.

16. *We urge* that progress be made in developing the Plans of Action/Work Programmes of the reconstituted Sectors and Sub-sectors of BIMSTEC cooperation and *urge* Lead Member States to complete the tasks of developing their respective Plans of Action/Work Programmes as soon as possible.

*We agree* on the following:

#### **A. Trade, Investment and Development**

17. *We emphasize* the need for greater cooperation in trade, investment and development particularly in the context of post-COVID 19 economic recovery, to strengthen regional integration in the Bay of Bengal region. *We reiterate* the importance of early conclusion of the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area in order to foster intra-regional trade and investment and enhance regional competitiveness.

18. *We underscore* that the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers, strengthening of trade facilitation measures and seamless transport connectivity are essential to unleashing the full potential of trade and investment cooperation among the BIMSTEC Member States.

19. *We urge* the Trade Negotiating Committee and its Working Groups to accelerate the finalization of BIMSTEC Free Trade Area and its constituent agreements including their annexures.

20. *We task* the Working Group on Rules of Origin to build on the progress made during its 21<sup>st</sup> Meeting to finalize the Rules for Determination of Origin of Goods and Operational Certification Procedures and Product Specific Rules as a priority in order to finalize the Agreement on Trade in Goods of the BIMSTEC FTA.

21. *We thank* the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for the publication of the report titled “**BIMSTEC Trade Facilitation Strategic Framework 2030**” in collaboration with BIMSTEC Secretariat as a guideline to enhancing the regional trade facilitation environment over the coming days.

22. *We welcome* the initiative of India to host the First “**Trade Facilitation Capacity Building Programme**” from 7 to 20 May 2023 organized by Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), New Delhi in collaboration with ADB.

23. *We approve* the recommendation to include Blue Economy under this sector and *urge* the Lead Country to take effective initiative to harness the benefits of Blue Economy.

#### **Sub-Sector: Blue Economy**

24. *We urge* the Member States to constitute an Inter-Governmental Expert Group to develop an action plan on Blue Economy, keeping in mind the special needs and circumstances of the landlocked Member States.

## **B. Environment and Climate Change**

25. *We welcome* the establishment of a Joint Working Group on Environment and Climate Change and *note* with satisfaction the holding of its first Meeting.
26. *We appreciate* developing a draft Concept Paper on "Potential Areas for Cooperation among the Member States on Environment and Climate Change" and draft Plan of Action on Environment and Climate Change.
27. *We note* the recommendations of the Second Meeting of BIMSTEC Think Tanks Dialogue on Regional Security under the theme of Environment and Climate Change: Preserving Mountains and Oceans Ecosystems.
28. *We stress* the importance of stronger collaboration to develop a regional action framework on cooperation and coordination on the environment and climate change among BIMSTEC Member States and *commit* to implementing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.
29. *We approve* the recommendation to include Mountain Economy under this sector and *urge* the Lead Country to take effective initiative to harness the benefits of Mountain Economy.

### **Sub-Sector: Mountain Economy**

30. *We urge* the Member States to constitute an Inter-Governmental Expert Group to develop a Plan of Action to promote Mountain Economy.

## **C. Security**

31. *We recall* the directives of our Leaders for holding the BIMSTEC Home Ministers' Meeting and emphasize the importance of continuing with the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs' Meeting.
32. *We approve* the reporting schema for various dialogue mechanisms operating under the Security Sector of BIMSTEC Cooperation.

### **Sub-Sector: Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC)**

33. *We reiterate* the strong commitment of our Leaders to counter and prevent the spread of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization and *task* the authorities concerned to take concrete measures for cooperation and coordination among our law enforcement, intelligence and security organizations.

34. *We agree* to expedite the ratification of the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters signed in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 30 March 2022 during the Fifth BIMSTEC Summit.

35. *We encourage* effective implementation of the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organised Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking.

36. *We urge* early conclusion of the BIMSTEC Convention Against Trafficking in Persons.

37. *We welcome* Thailand's initiative on the "Report on Illicit Flow of Funds (IFF) and Action Plan to Prevent the IFF among the BIMSTEC Member States".

38. *We appreciate* the publication of the e-version of the '**BIMSTEC Annual Drug Report 2019**' and the continuation of publication of the BIMSTEC Annual Drug Report and *thank* Thailand for taking lead to publish e-version of the **Second Edition of the "BIMSTEC Annual Drug Report 2021"**.

39. *We welcome* the establishment of the "**BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Human Trafficking**" and look forward to convening its First Meeting to deal with issues pertaining to this Sub-Group including finalization of the draft Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Sub-Group.

#### ***Sub-Sector: Energy***

40. *We recognize* the urgent need to promote energy cooperation and energy trade among the Member States to achieve energy security and greater economic integration in the region.

41. *We take note* of the Joint Statement of the Third "BIMSTEC Energy Ministers' Meeting" held virtually in Kathmandu, Nepal on 20 April 2022 and *endorse* their deliberations.

42. *We emphasize* on the early implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection. *We appreciate* holding of the Second Meeting of BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Coordination Committee (BGICC) on 28 February 2023 in Bengaluru, India.

#### ***Sub-Sector: Disaster Management***

43. *We reiterate* the strong commitment of our Leaders to undertake Annual BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise and *encourage* the regular conduct of BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise.

44. *We welcome* the operationalization of the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate as well as the finalization of "the Host Country Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the BIMSTEC Secretariat for Establishing BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate in India".

## **D. Agriculture and Food Security**

### ***Sub -Sector: Agriculture***

45. *We stress* the importance of stronger agricultural cooperation to contribute to rural employment, poverty alleviation, food security, sustainable consumption and increased profitability of farmers in particular in the context of the post-COVID 19 recovery.

46. *We note* with satisfaction the holding of the Second “BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture (2<sup>nd</sup> BAMB)” in New Delhi, India on 10 November 2022 in virtual mode and *endorse* their deliberations.

47. *We express* our satisfaction for the adoption of the Plan of Action on Strengthening BIMSTEC Agricultural Cooperation (2023-2027) at the 2<sup>nd</sup> BAMB.

48. *We welcome* the initiative of Myanmar for holding the “Regional Seminar on Food Security and Sustainable Food Systems in BIMSTEC” held virtually in Myanmar on 25 January 2023.

49. *We appreciate* the finalization of the Memorandum of Understanding between International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and BIMSTEC Secretariat, and *welcome* its signing.

50. *We encourage* the Member States and the Secretariat to continue their efforts to establish a meaningful partnership with appropriate regional and international organizations to strengthen project-based cooperation under Agriculture and Food Security Sector.

### ***Sub-sector: Fisheries and Livestock***

51. *We welcome* the establishment of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Fisheries and Livestock and look forward to convening its first meeting to discuss issues pertaining to the Sub-Sector, including the finalization of the Draft Plan of Action on Fisheries and Livestock Cooperation.

## **E. People-to-People Contact**

52. *We approve* the recommendation to include Poverty Alleviation under this sector and *urge* the Lead Country to take effective initiative on poverty alleviation.

### ***Sub-sector: Culture***

53. *We recognize* the importance of cultural cooperation and exchanges among the Member States and their potentials to contribute in the promotion of cultural industries in the region.

54. **We welcome** the setting up of the Expert Group on Cultural Cooperation to promote culture, heritages and exchanges in the region. **We urge** the Member States for early finalization of the Plan of Action. **We appreciate** the decision of the Government of Nepal to host the BIMSTEC Expert Group Meeting on Cultural Cooperation in the year 2023.

55. **We emphasize** on the early operationalization of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory, which will serve as a repository for information on cultural industries.

#### ***Sub-sector: Tourism***

56. **We reaffirm** the significance of the tourism sector in reinforcing the historical, cultural and economic synergies in the region and **agree** to strengthen cooperation to promote the development of tourism sector.

57. **We encourage** the Member States for early finalization of the Plan of Action on Development and Promotion of tourism including the early functioning of BIMSTEC Tourism Information Centre and utilization of the BIMSTEC Tourism Fund. **We also emphasize** the importance that the meetings of BIMSTEC tourism mechanisms are held regularly.

58. **We thank** ADB for the publication of the “Report on Leveraging Thematic Circuits for BIMSTEC Tourism Development” and **urge** the Member States for early implementation of BIMSTEC Thematic Circuits.

#### ***Sub-sector: People-to-People Contact***

59. **We underscore** the need to enhance greater people-to-people contact among the Member States through increased interactions and exchange programmes.

60. **We encourage** the Member States to finalize the Draft “Charter of the Association of BIMSTEC Speakers and Parliamentarians” as soon as possible. **We also urge** the Member States to explore the possibility of establishing other forums of youth, entrepreneurs, researchers, universities, cultural organizations, media etc. to further promote the people-to-people contact.

61. **We note** with satisfaction the commemorative events undertaken by the Member States and the Secretariat to celebrate the Twenty Fifth Anniversary of BIMSTEC including the commemorative exhibition, BIMSTEC Quiz and publication of “25 Years of BIMSTEC” book.

62. **We note** and **commend** the useful inputs being provided by the BNPTT. To ensure greater focus and relevance of their deliberation for BIMSTEC cooperation activities, **we direct** the National Focal Points to attend this meeting on a regular basis.

### ***Sub-Sector: Poverty Alleviation***

63. *We encourage* the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Poverty Alleviation to review the BIMSTEC Poverty Plan of Action and come up with suggestions to involve various Sectors and Sub-sectors to contribute to the overarching goal of poverty alleviation.

### **F. Science, Technology and Innovation**

64. *We encourage* the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) that was established following the Fifth BIMSTEC Summit to explore the means to strengthen cooperation in the STI sector and its sub-sectors.

### ***Sub-Sector: Technology***

65. *We welcome* the signing of the Memorandum of Association (MoA) on the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility (TTF) in Colombo, Sri Lanka during the Fifth BIMSTEC Summit and look forward to the completion of all necessary formalities for its early entry into force and the constitution of its Governing Board.

66. *We encourage* the Expert Group on Technology to develop a Plan of Action for cooperation in the Technology Sub-Sector.

### ***Sub-Sector: Health***

67. *We recognize* the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all aspects of life in the region and *reiterate* the need to strengthen the cooperation among the Member States on public health issues in the Bay of Bengal Region.

68. *We recognize* the need to strengthen regional capacity on public health including pandemic preparedness and *encourage* the Expert Group on Public Health to develop a Plan of Action and also explore possibility of international support for regional capacity building in this sector.

69. *We encourage* the Expert Group on Public Health to consider initiating efforts for the convening of a Meeting of Health Ministers of BIMSTEC to strengthen and advance cooperation in public health in the BIMSTEC region.

70. *We appreciate* the work of the BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine (BTFTM) and *encourage* the Task Force to expedite implementation of activities in its agreed Plan of Action.

### ***Sub-Sector: Human Resource Development***

71. *We recognize* that Human Resource Development includes a range of areas including education and vocational training as well as upgrading the skills and attitudes of employees at all levels to maximize effectiveness and efficiency.



72. *We encourage* the Expert Group on Human Resource Development to develop a Plan of Action accordingly, for meaningful cooperation in Human Resource Development.

### **G. Connectivity**

73. *We emphasize* the need to develop a resilient regional transport connectivity system capable of withstanding future disruptions with the focus on the development of maritime transport, waterways and railways, road connections and air cargo operation.

74. *We stress* the urgent need for the implementation of the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity.

75. *We instruct* the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group (BTCWG) to expedite implementation of the agreed activities under the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity as soon as possible.

76. *We note* with satisfaction the finalization of the Draft Text of the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation and *approve* the finalized Text of the Agreement.

77. *We encourage* initiating the process of drafting the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) according to the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation for discussion in the Joint Shipping Committee.

78. *We urge* the BTCWG to finalize the Concept Note of the BIMSTEC Framework Agreement on Transit, Transshipment and Movement of Vehicular Traffic between and among BIMSTEC Member Countries in order to facilitate the formulation of the draft Framework Agreement. *We emphasize* simultaneous negotiation and finalization of the BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger, Personal and Cargo Vehicular Traffic between and among BIMSTEC Member States.

79. *We thank* ADB for the publication of the “Report on Financing Transport Connectivity Infrastructure in the BIMSTEC Region”.

### **BIMSTEC DEVELOPMENT FUND**

80. *We approve* the recommendation of the BPWC Meeting to postpone the establishment of the BIMSTEC Development Fund (BDF) at this stage for next 3-5 years. *We task* the BPWC to identify ways and means of utilizing the technical and financial resources of the multilateral development agencies and regional organizations of the Asian region to support BIMSTEC cooperation projects.

## **NORM SETTING**

81. *We agree* to expedite conclusion of pending agreements and to ratify the agreements that have already been signed.

82. *We agree* to recommend the signing of the ‘**Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation**’ during the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit and *urge* the Member States to complete the internal procedures to sign the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation.

## **BUDGETARY MATTERS**

83. *We approve* the budget of the Secretariat for Fiscal Year 2022 and estimated budget for Fiscal Year 2023 as recommended by the BIMSTEC Senior Officials Meeting (SOM).

## **FOLLOW UP**

84. *We instruct* the SOM to regularly monitor implementation of our decisions and report progress to the next Ministerial Meeting.

## **JOINT STATEMENT OF THE NINETEENTH BIMSTEC MINISTERIAL MEETING**

85. *We adopt* the Joint Statement of the Nineteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting for submission to the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit for consideration of the Leaders.

## **RECOMMENDATION OF DRAFT OUTCOME DOCUMENT OF THE SIXTH BIMSTEC SUMMIT**

86. *We recommend* the draft text of the BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030 for consideration of the Leaders.

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

*We* look forward to meeting in Thailand for the Twentieth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting and the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit.

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