Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral
Technical and Economic Cooperation

Press Release

First BIMSTEC Health Ministers' Meeting

Colombo, 16 November 2026

The First BIMSTEC Health Ministers' Meeting was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 11 November 2026, to deliberate on enhancing and deepening regional cooperation in Health Sector. It was preceded by Inaugural Meeting of BIMSTEC Senior Health Officials on 10 November 2026.

Joint Ministerial Statement

The First BIMSTEC Health Ministers' Meeting adopted a Joint Ministerial Statement, which embodies the commitment of the BIMSTEC Member States to advance regional health priorities, strengthen institutional cooperation and identify concrete areas for collaborative action to address the shared public health challenges they face.

Cooperation in Health Sector

The 8th Meeting of BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers had identified Public Health as a priority area for cooperation under BIMSTEC. During the initial years, cooperation in Health Sector focused primarily on promoting traditional medicine through BIMSTEC Network of National Centres of Coordination in Traditional Medicine (BNNCCTM). The BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine (BTFTM) finalised in 2020 BIMSTEC Plan of Action for Development of Traditional Medicine.

Further, the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Public Health (EGPH) in its First meeting, held in July 2023, finalised the Plan of Action on Public Health for 2023-2025. Subsequently, the Second Meeting of EGPH, held in May 2026, revised the Plan of Action for the period 2026-2030. The 6th BIMSTEC Summit, held in Bangkok in April 2025, had decided to establish a mechanism for BIMSTEC Health Ministers' Meeting.

Health Ministers adopted the Revised BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Public Health (2026-2030), providing a framework for advancing regional cooperation through coordinated initiatives, technical collaboration, capacity-building and regular monitoring of progress. They took note of the progress in implementation of the World Bank-FAO supported South Asia Region (SAR) Capacity Building for Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness, and Response (PPR) with a One

Health Approach Project and continuation of BIMSTEC Project Management Unit (PMU) in Health Sector.

The Health Ministers noted the contribution of the BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence on Tropical Medicine in Thailand since its establishment and the initiative of India to establish the BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence in Traditional Medicine in Jamnagar, Gujarat. BIMSTEC Health Ministers also welcomed Sri Lanka's proposal to establish the BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence on Public Health and Bangladesh's proposal to establish a BIMSTEC Regional Zoonotic Disease Observatory and Early Warning System in Dhaka.

Recognising the importance of traditional medicine, the Health Ministers commended the initiatives relating to creation of BIMSTEC Traditional Medicine Portal, development of pharmacopoeia, harmonisation of traditional medicine curricula, research collaboration and protection of traditional medicine knowledge, genetic resources and intellectual property rights.

The Health Ministers underscored the importance of strengthening cooperation in addressing emerging and shared public health challenges, including emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, antimicrobial resistance (AMR), zoonotic diseases, non-communicable diseases, mental health and health impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. They encouraged development of a BIMSTEC Regional Plan of Action on AMR and called for enhanced collaboration under the One Health Approach, recognising the interconnectedness of human, animal and environmental health.

The Health Ministers also highlighted the importance of digital technologies in enhancing health services and encouraged development of a BIMSTEC Digital Health Framework to promote telemedicine, electronic health records (EHR) interoperability and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in diagnostics and disease modeling.

The Health Ministers recognised the importance of continued engagement with the development partners and international organizations, including World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), seeking their support for implementation of various Plans of Action in Health Sector supporting agreed regional health priorities.

The Health Ministers Meeting also welcomed the offer of the Kingdom of Thailand to host the Second BIMSTEC Health Ministers' Meeting in 2028.

Thus, First BIMSTEC Health Ministers Meeting marked a historic step towards translating the shared commitment of Member States to cooperate in Health Sector into practical regional initiatives and strengthening a coordinated, resilient and responsive public health architecture for the Bay of Bengal region.

About BIMSTEC

BIMSTEC comprises seven countries of the Bay of Bengal region: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. It pursues regional cooperation in the following areas: Agriculture & Food Security; Blue Economy; Connectivity; Culture; Disaster Management; Energy; Environment & Climate Change; Fiscal & Monetary Policy; Health; Human Resource Development; Fisheries & Livestock; Mountain Economy; People-to-People Relations; Poverty Alleviation; Security; Science, Technology & Innovation; Tourism; Trade & Investment; and Women Development.

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