

Development of BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Background and Rationale

At the First Economic Forum in 1997, the formation of the BIMST-EC Chamber of Commerce was proposed.

At the BIMST-EC Private sector representatives Meeting on 24-25 June 1999 at Bangkok, Bangladesh proposed the establishment of a BIMST-EC Business Exchange which would be an extension data base containing reliable up-to-date information relating to business opportunities and contacts in each country.

India was given the assignment to prepare a concept paper and India tabled this concept paper at the Business Forum held in December 2002 in Colombo which was accepted. This was endorsed by the BIMST-EC Economic Council and the Council of Ministers.

Timeline Progress

On 30 November 2003, BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BIMSTEC-CCI) was inaugurated (Minute of the Inauguration appeared as **Annex I**). The main objective of the Chamber was to coordinate between the private sectors in BIMSTEC member countries. Following the establishment of the Chamber, the Business Convention was organized on 1 December 2003 in Colombo, appeared as **Annex II**. BIMSTEC emphasizes cooperation between the public sector and the private sector, including private participation in various projects. In addition to being the focal point of private sector, the Chamber should also organize various events such as exhibitions, BIMSTEC Food Festival, as well as maintain a website providing information on trade and investment of BIMSTEC countries.

At this meeting it was agreed to submit a draft budget for the establishment and functioning of the BIMST-CCI Secretariat, appeared as **Annex III**, as well as the structure for the membership, appeared as **Annex IV**.

BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce Progress Report

The Chamber was hosted by The National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka. The annual general meeting (AGM) had been called for in 2004 and again in 2005 but could not be held as all members had not responded. The NCCSL had incurred direct expense of Rn 325,000 to maintain BIMSTEC Chamber Website. Funding was an issue. (Full report attached as **Annex V**)

In the discussion that followed, the Chairman raised the following:

- What are the reasons for the Chamber not being able to function?
- Funding support from institutional sources as subscription alone was inadequate.
- BIMSTEC CCI was an important creation and needed activation. To re-look at composition and funding. Amend constitution to include all apex private national organization from member countries as primary members with equal rights. Also build role of BCCI in the Business Forum and the Economic Forum.
- Form a Task Force to redraft the constitution time bound responsibility.
- Hold the AGM together with a connected event to improve attendance at AGM.

Meeting Recommendations from 5th BIMSTEC Business Forum

1. Annual Meeting necessary, otherwise no interaction. Ensure each organization sends at least one representative.
2. Issue of a BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat is important.
3. Linked to this is funding – some members have raised the need for transportation and hospitality. Member countries could consider contribution as well as seeking funding from ADB. This was the single biggest problem
4. Selection and rotation of Chairs have been made at the suggestion of members Governments. It is strongly recommended that selection of Chairs be based on the criteria of willingness and expertise.
5. The role and support of private sector in the FTA discussions as well as inclusion of Service sector was recommended.
6. Mechanism for exchange of information and data both accurate and timely was highlighted.
7. Connectivity within BIMSTEC was raised and a clear time line for the BIMSTEC Business Visa sought from the Economic Forum. Since there is a SAARC Business Visa in place, this needs to be looked at.
8. While the BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce and Industry has been in existence for 3 years, its first AGM is yet to be held. Issues of membership to include all apex, national industry bodies in each member country with equal right and funding need to be resolved. Also, need to bring the BIMSTEC CCI into the field of the Business Forum as well as the Economic Forum.
9. Need to create awareness within member countries in BIMSTEC through PR exercise and flagship events like – annual Trade Fair, games/football matches etc. Hold the first trade fair in India in 2008.
10. Decision on the correct name – BIMSTEC or Bay of Bengal Initiative.
11. Next Business Forum meeting back to back with BIMSTEC Summit in New Delhi in February 2007. Also, Annual General Meeting of BIMSTEC Chamber should be convened.

(as of 18 March 2008)
BIMSTEC Centre

BIMST-EC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY INAUGURAL MEETING - NOVEMBER 30, 2003 MINUTES

The inaugural meeting of the BIMST-EC Chamber of Commerce & Industry (BIMSTEC -CCI) was held on Sunday 30, November 2003 at Hotel Taj Samudra, Colombo.

Business Sessions

The Business Sessions commenced at 5.30 pm. Mr Chandra Embuldeniya Chairman of the BIMST-EC Business Forum chaired the meeting. The others at the head table were Mr Asoka Gunasekera, President of the National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka (NCCSL) and Mr Neil Seneviratne, Secretary General of NCCSL.

Names of the participants are in Annex I.

Chairman welcomed the delegates from Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand. He outlined the work done by the BIMST-EC Business Forum highlighting events such as organizing the Business Convention, the Launch of the BIMST-EC Website, holding of ProFoods Exhibition and Convention in August 2003, holding INTRAD 2003 Exhibition & Investor Forum in November 2003 and the work carried out on the Balance Scorecard that will help to monitor the progress of BIMST-EC activities.

He said that it was at the Economic Forum held in 1997 that the formation of the BIMST-EC Chamber of Commerce was proposed. India was given the assignment to prepare a concept paper and India tabled this concept paper at the Business Forum held in December 2002 in Colombo which was accepted. This was endorsed by the BIMST-EC Economic Council and the Council of Ministers. Thereafter the proposal was fine tuned by Sri Lanka and is now in your hands as the Draft Constitution. He said that proposed Constitution can be fashioned to suit our needs as we go on.

Election of Protem Chairman

Mr Asoka Gunasekera, President, NCCSL was proposed and unanimously accepted as the Protem Chairman.

Adoption of Constitution

The draft constitution circulated earlier was adopted unanimously. Proposed by Mr K G Balakrishnan of India and seconded by Mr Yussuf Harun of Bangladesh, as a framework to commence activities.

Confirmation of Founder Members

The following were confirmed as Founder Members of the BIMSTEC-CCI.
Bangladesh - Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FBCCI)
India - The Associated Chambers of Commerce & Industry of India (ASSOCHAM)

Myanmar - Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce & Industry

Sri Lanka - The National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka (NCCSL)

Thailand - The Thai Chamber of Commerce

Confirmation of Associate Members

This item was deferred for a later date until after the membership structure was clearly defined.

Election of Office Bearers (Term of office for at least two years)

• President

Mr Asoka Gunasekera, President of the NCCSL, in recognition of the work done by Mr Chandra Embuldeniya, Immediate Past President, NCCSL for a long time on BIMST-EC, proposed Mr Chandra Embuldeniya for the post of President. This was seconded by Mr K G Balakrishnan and unanimously accepted. This

• Vice President (One from each member country)

Following were elected as Vice Presidents:

Bangladesh

• Mr Yussuf Abdullah Harun, Past President, Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry

India

• Mr R K Somany, President ASSOCHAM

Myanmar

• To be nominated

Thailand

• Tawat T. YipInTsoi, Vice Chairman, Thai Chamber of Commerce

• Secretary General

Mr Neil Seneviratne, Secretary General of NCCSL was unanimously elected as the Secretary General of the BIMST-EC Chamber.

Secretariat

It was proposed and accepted that the Secretariat should be permanently located at the NCCSL in Sri Lanka.

Joining Fee

The determination of the joining fee and the annual membership were deferred until the budget was proposed and as well as the membership structure finalized.

Auditors

M/s Kreston MNS & Co Auditors for the NCCSL were elected as the Auditors of the BIMSTEC-CCI.

At this stage the meeting was adjourned for the Ceremonial Sessions to commence after the arrival of the Chief Guest, Hon. Ravi Karunanayake, Minister of Commerce & Consumer Affairs.

Hon. Ravi Karunanayake arrived at 7.30 p m. The Ceremonial Sessions commenced thereafter with Mr Chandra Embuldeniya President, BIMSTEC-CCI in the Chair. The others at the head table were Hon. Ravi Karunanayake, Minister of Commerce & Consumer Affairs, Mr Y A Harun, Past President FBCCI, Bangladesh, Mr J Bhuyan, Secretary General ASSOCHAM, India, Mr Asoka Gunasekera, President, NCCSL, Sri Lanka, Mr Phairush Burappachaisri, Thai Chamber of Commerce, Thailand and Mr Neil Seneviratne, Secretary General, NCCSL, Sri Lanka.

Mr Embuldeniya having welcomed the Chief Guest and Invitees said that the goal of the Chamber is to facilitate trade and investment and through the passage of trade and investment in the region give rise to an enormous economic development that will also uplift the standard of living of the people in this region.

He said that at the last Economic Forum there was great concern expressed by delegates about a lack of progress in the BIMST-EC Organisation. Hence in order to monitor activities and work out strategies we proposed the Balance Scorecard which is used extensively by bigger Corporations to align strategy to their organization. He said that he had conducted a workshop at the Department of Commerce with all focal points in Sri Lanka on the Balance Scorecard and later presented the proposal to Bangkok Working Group (BWG) which they are considering favourably.

He concluded by thanking the delegates for electing him as President.

Hon. Ravi Karunanayake in his address congratulated the Organizers for launching the BIMSTEC CCI successfully. He said that he was glad that the organizing Chambers were maintaining a very healthy and productive relationship with his Ministry.

The strong presence of business delegations to this meeting demonstrate the confidence placed in the BIMST-EC process by business community of the member countries, he said.

He said that the most important decision taken by member countries is to establish the proposed BIMST-EC free trade area. The draft Free Trade Agreement would be presented at the forthcoming BIMST-EC Summit meeting in Thailand in February 2004.

He said the establishment of the BIMSTEC CCI is indeed a decision in the right direction at a time member countries have launched a number of initiatives to create a business and investment friendly environment in the region.

The mandate of this Chamber encompass not only regional co-operation in trade,

commerce and investment, it covers arbitration on commercial disputes as well. He said that he was also happy to hear that there has been an unanimous agreement for having the Secretariat in Sri Lanka, which is something we proposed at the last meeting. And I know that it will be manned properly. He concluded by congratulating the Office Bearers of the BIMSTEC-CCI and wished the new Chamber all success.

The vote of thanks was delivered by Mr K G Balakrishnan, Chairman KG Denim Limited, Sri Kannapiran Mills Ltd.
A reception followed the meeting.

Neil Seneviratne
Secretary General
BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce & Industry
December 12, 2003

BIMST-EC Business Convention

“Mechanisms to promote greater level of trade & investment within BIMST-EC Region”

December 1, 2003 - Hotel Taj Samudra, Colombo, Sri Lanka

REPORT

1.0 The first BIMST-EC Business Convention organized by the National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka (NCCSL) in association with the several other Chambers and State Agencies was held on December 1, 2003 at Hotel Taj Samudra, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The Ceremonial Opening was at 9.00 am with Mr. Chandra Embuldeniya President of the BIMSTEC-Chamber of Commerce & Industry and the Chairman, BIMST-EC Business Forum, in the Chair. The Chief Guest was Hon. Prof. G L Pieris, Minister of Enterprise Development, Industrial Policy and Investment Promotion and the Guest of Honour was Hon. Lal Gamage, Minister Assisting Foreign Affairs. The others at the Head table were:

Bangladesh	-	Mr. Y A Harun, Past President FBCCI
India	-	Mr. J Bhuyan, Secretary General ASSOCHAM,
Sri Lanka	-	Mr. Chandra Embuldeniya, Chairman, BIMST-EC B/F Mr. Neil Seneviratne, Secretary General, NCCSL
Thailand	-	Mr. Phairush Burappachaisri, Thai Chamber of
Commerce		

Address by Mr. Chandra Embuldeniya Chairman BIMST-EC Business Forum

After having welcomed the Chief Guest, distinguished delegates from BIMST-EC countries and other distinguished invitees, Mr. Embuldeniya said that today's Convention is the fulfillment of a decision taken at the BIMST-EC Business Forum held in Colombo December 2002 and endorsed by the Economic Forum. Many of the decisions taken have already been fulfilled he said, as we have done the considerable amount of work in the year gone by.

What we plan to do today is to discuss mechanisms that can be operational within a short period. He said that with inauguration of the BIMST-EC Chamber of Commerce & Industry yesterday, the business community has got into a working arrangement of future development of Trade & Investment.

Address by Chief Guest Hon. Prof. G L Peiris Minister of Enterprise Development, Industrial Policy and Investment Promotion.

Hon. Prof. Peiris in his address stated that the progress of the work that BIMST-EC Business Forum is attempting to do depends very much on a certain atmosphere being in place. There has to be confidence; we need to focus on modalities for modernizing our trade relationships and financing our banking system.

He said that during the short period this Government has been in power, they have been able to set right the macro economic indicators. This has made possible for Sri Lanka to be seen as a point of entry into market of the South Asian Region. It is the new environment that is very much in evidence in this country today that imparts meaning and substance and reality to the kind of discussions that is to take place today. These changes have taken place principally as a result of the cease fire agreement in operation.

We have tried to stimulate business in this country, not only big business but small and medium sector as well. During the last 6 months Parliament has enacted more than a dozen pieces of legislation to modernize our intellectual property laws, deal with problems in the labour sector, modernize our laws regarding to banking, etc. He said that the spirit of economic buoyancy that is evident today is benefiting not just Colombo and its environment, but the government is addressing problems for imbalance with regard to distribution of income in Sri Lanka.

He said that the peace process which is so important to move forward is at a critical juncture. He said that between September 2002 – April 2003 Government had concluded six rounds of talks with the LTTE which were aimed at consolidation of the cease fire agreement. Now we are poised to embark on the second phase of the discussion which are qualitatively different; looking at just and durable peace. However the events of 4 November 2003 when the President took over three very important Ministries were a serious set back. As an elected Government with a sense of responsibility, had a duty to calm down things and that is why the country is in a condition of relative stability.

Now what is the way forward? He asked. What I want to say is that Sri Lanka is determined to resolve some of these problems in the South in order to create the condition that would be necessary to move forward this initiative and to accomplish the objectives which BIMST-EC has set itself.

One of the more refreshing thoughts during this time is consistent support and the goodwill from the international community. We are negotiating with USA to enlarge the TIFFA agreement to a fully pledged FTA. The Hon. Ravi Karunanayake, Minister of Commerce & Consumer Affairs has done some valuable work in negotiating a series of FTAs, with several countries.

He said that Thailand went through similar problems and the redeeming feature there was a unifying influence of His Highness the King. In Bangladesh too there have been similar problems but they came out with the interesting idea that a group of very distinguished people headed by a retired Chief Justice would be responsible for conducting elections in case of dissolution of Parliament. He went on saying that Sri Lanka too had evolved some mechanisms to overcome these problems but practical implementation of some of these proposals was difficult.

He wished to underline one basic fact as we begin our deliberation, which is the commonality of our problems. There is he said a common tread that runs through the priorities of our country and this he said is the main reason why a pooling of our collective experiences would be beneficial and useful. He concluded by wishing the deliberations all success.

Vote of thanks was delivered by Mr Neil Seneviratne, Secretary General, NCCSL.

2.0 Business Sessions

- (a) The Business Sessions commenced at 10.15 am with Mr Chandra Embuldeniya in the Chair. The list of participating delegates is in Annex (1)
- (b) Appointment of Rapporteur
Ms Amalee Dissanayake and Ms Ayoni Waniganayake were appointed as Rapporteurs.
- (c) Adoption of Agenda
The Agenda was adopted and is at Annex 2.
- (d) Country presentations

Summary of the country paper submitted were presented by the delegates present.

Bangladesh	-	Mr Y A Harun, Past President FBCCI
India	-	Mr J Bhuyan, Secretary General ASSOCHAM,
Sri Lanka	-	Mr Chandra Embuldeniya, Chairman, BIMST-EC B/F
Thailand	-	Mr Phairush Burappachaisri, Thai Chamber of Commerce

A discussion followed and a set of recommendations were adopted. Annex (3)

Mr Embuldeniya closed the sessions thanking all participants for their valuable contribution.

Neil Seneviratne
Secretary General
BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Draft Annual Budget of BIMST-CCI Secretariat

Fixed Expenditure

	Capital		
	Computer, Printers, UPS etc	250,000	
	Furniture	75,000	
	Photo copying machine	<u>75,000</u>	400,000
	Office space rental for 700 sq.ft.@ Rs. 40/ m per Sq.ft.	336,000	
	Electricity, Water and other services	90,000	
	Telephone, faxes, e-mail	150,000	
	Printing stationery	75,000	
Note 1	Local Traveling	150,000	
Note 2	Foreign Traveling	500,000	
Note 3	Hosting charges for BIMST-EC website	72,000	
Note 4	Entertainment + Hosting meetings	450,000	
Note 5	Wages	900,000	
	BPF/ETF	135,000	
Note 6	Advertisement, promotional materials	100,000	<u>2,958,000</u>
	TOTAL		<u>3,358,000</u>

Remark :

- Note 1 Local traveling to CEO to attend meeting, arrange functions, etc.
- Note 2 Oversea traveling to President and CEO participate in Regional Meetings. Budgeting for two meetings per year.
- Note 3 At present the website is managed by NCCSL, and this amount is the annual hosting fee. This will be transferred to the BIMST-CCI.
- Note 4 Expenditure for organizing two meeting per year related to BIMST-EC B/F matters, such as the Business Convention and the AGM of BIMST-CCI
- Note 5 The Secretariat will employ only three persons, the CEO, another Executive and a Driver-car Office Aids. This allocation is no over their wages.
- Note 6 To cover cost of printing of promotional brochure, handout, etc.

Membership Category and Organisation Structure

1.0 Founder Members - As decided on 30 November 2003.

Nepal and Bhutan who have joined recently to be offered similar status to Founder Members. The respective Government Ministry focal points in these countries to be informed to nominate their Founder Members who would be incorporated in the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Chamber.

2.0 Members

Other important Chambers and relevant Trade Organisations in member countries could be enrolled as members. The request for enrolments will necessarily be proposed and channeled through the Founder Members of each country.

3.0 Associate Members

Individual Companies registered in the respective countries and recommended by Founder Members are eligible for Associate membership. This is in accordance with the consensus expressed at the previous BIMST-EC inaugural meeting.

Membership Fees

It is proposed that the minimum annual payment from each country to be US\$ 5,000/- under the following break down.

Founder Members - US\$ 2,000
Members - US\$ 1,000
Associate Members - US\$ 500

This would encourage Founder Members to canvas for Members and Associate Members to share costs.

Bangladesh

Whilst the Secretariat would communicate directly with each of the Founder Members/ Members and Associate Members (all referred to as Members hereinafter), it is proposed that the BIMST-EC Secretariat make proportionate contribution each year to the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry, towards meeting their country secretariat expenses.

India

Mr R. K. Somany,
President

ASSOCHAM
Mr Chandra Embuldeniya
The National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka
No. 450, D R Wijewardena Mawatha

Myanmar (*)

COLOMBO
SRI LANKA.
Mr Sein Win Hlaing,
Secretary General
EMFCCI
Tel : 0094 - 11 - 2689600 Fax : 0094 - 11- 689596
E-mail : chandrae@slt.lk website : www.bimstec.org

Thailand

Mr Tawat T. YipInTsoi,
Vice Chairman,
Thai Chamber of Commerce

Sri Lanka (*)

**REPORT OF THE 5TH MEETING OF BIMSTEC BUSINESS FORUM
26th October 2006 – Bangkok, THAILAND**

1. Welcome Address by Mr. Chatchai Boonyarat

Mr. Chatchai Boonyarat, Vice Chairman, The Thai Chamber of Commerce opened the meeting by introducing himself and welcoming everyone to the 5th Meeting of the BIMSTEC Business Forum. He said it was privilege for Thailand to host the 5th meeting.

Mr. Chatchai stated that BIMSTEC was a major trade bloc and of great attention for Thailand. He said that Thailand was strategically poised to connect BIMSTEC with East/North Asia.

He then invited Mr. Vinod Gupta, Advisor, Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry to brief the forum on the past year's activities.

2. Address on the Business Forum past activities by Mr. Vinod Gupta

Mr. Gupta complimented The Board of Trade of Thailand for organizing the meeting and said it was quite significant from the perspective of BIMSTEC. Mr. Gupta stated that despite the importance of the Business Forum, he expressed concern and disappointment at the sluggish pace of both development and initiatives, at the business and government levels. He said that the Forum did not achieve anything notable since the 4th Meeting. Several issues discussed then remain valid and included (i) improved availability of and access to trade and investment data, (ii) focus on trade in services, (iii) increased interaction and information-sharing among the business, (iv) need for setting up a permanent "Secretariat", (v) increase frequency of Business Forum meetings, (vi) funding mechanism for projects envisaged in the Task Force Report and (vii) developing a better synergy with BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He urged that the present meeting focus on these pressing issues. He also said that meeting of Trade Ministers and Senior Trade and Economic Officials Meeting (STEOM) must be held especially to consider the recommendations of the Task Force. This was important as trade and investment relations were inherently dynamic. He also drew attention of the importance of the Free Trade Agreement and called for a joint strategy by the Business Forum and the BIMSTEC Chamber for the FTA. Mr. Gupta stated that FTA negotiations begin with optimism but soon turn protectionist. It is important to focus on the positive lists and announce these rather than get stuck with negative lists. Mr. Gupta suggested that a BIMSTEC Business Summit be held back to back with the next BIMSTEC political summit, likely to be held in February 2007 in New Delhi.

Mr. Chatchai thanked Mr. Vinod Gupta for his address.

3. Election of New Chairman, BIMSTEC Business Forum

The next item in the agenda related to election of the new Chairman of the BIMSTEC Business Forum.

Mr. Jayant Bhuyan, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) proposed that Mr. Chatchai Boonyarat be elected chairman. Mr. Chatchai suggested that rather than he, it would be appropriate for Mr. Satish Sehgal, Director, Board of Trade of Thailand to chair. This was carried unanimously.

In this remarks, Mr. Satish Sehgal thanked and deeply appreciated the honour and the trust bestowed on him. Mr. Satish also said that for the next 12 months, Thailand would support every possible way to ensure that the cooperation that exists gets increased.

4. Appointment of Rapporteur

The Chairman proposed that India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka act as Rapporteurs with India taking the lead. This was unanimously approved.

5. Brief Address by Chairman, BIMSTEC Business Forum

Mr. Satish Sehgal stated that this meeting was scheduled to be held in January 2006 but was being held only now. He was particularly keen that the Business Forum had a lot of potential and, therefore, it was important to ensure that several concrete steps be taken.

6. Approve the Minutes of previous Meeting held in New Delhi 2005

The Chairman invited attention of members to the minutes of the 4th Meeting held in New Delhi on 29th August 2005, which was annexed to the agenda papers of this meeting. The Chairman read out the minutes and invited comments.

Mr. Jayant Bhuyan, CII, stated that since no comments has been received, he recommended the minutes be approved and adopted. Members unanimously approved the minutes.

7. Country Paper

The Chairman stated that several country papers would be presented, in alphabetical order. However, both Bhutan and Nepal could not attend and, therefore, there would be no presentations. He suggested the presentations be followed by discussion.

Bangladesh – Mr. Abdul Awal Minto, former president, the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce, referred to the paper already included in the agenda paper and drew highlights to the potential of regional trade creation of \$ 43-59 billion under the BIMSTEC FTA. He gave an update on the Bangladesh economy – trade performance, incentives, infrastructure, investment, etc. He called for success in the WTO talks as also easy movement of businessmen within BIMSTEC member countries. The discussion covered, among others, the fishery sector.

India – Mr. Vinod Gupta, Advisor, Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry gave a brief on the work done by FICCI followed by a presentation on the Indian economy by Mr. Salil Sen, FICCI-Thailand. Mr. Jayant Bhuyan, CII

shared work done by his organization related to BIMSTEC. He also mentioned about the India-ASEAN car rally organized by CII in November 2004 and the forthcoming car rally coinciding with the next SAARC Summit in April 2007. He also extended an invitation to delegates to CII' Partnership Summit in Bangalore in January 2007.

The discussions related to the IT sector in India, SEZ's, condoms and HIV epidemic, plastics and petrochemicals sector, construction.

Myanmar – Mr. U Myint Soe, Deputy Chief of Mission, Minister Counsellor, Embassy of Myanmar stated that he did not have a brief to be able to make presentation.

Sri Lanka – Mr. Thilak Godamanna, Council member, The National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka (NCCSL) elaborated on the state of the economy in his country and focused on trade, services, agriculture, natural resources and infrastructure, highlighting the business opportunity that existed for BIMSTEC member countries.

He also mentioned about trade facilitation and that Sri Lanka has taken several steps to strengthen regional, bilateral and multilateral relations. He focused on the achievements of Sri Lanka in 2005 under BIMSTEC Agreement such as maintaining BIMSTEC Official website, promoting Food Processor Association activities, BIMSTEC FTA and BIMSTEC Business Travel Facilitation.

Thailand – Dr. Songtum Pinto, Division Executive, Balance of Payment Division, Bank of Thailand made the country presentation on Thailand focusing on the Thai economy as also trade and investment between Thailand and BIMSTEC members. The discussions related to the low intra-BIMSTEC trade and how to enhance. Also, how to expand the trade base to include agro-industries/products and increase role of SMEs.

8. BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce Progress Report

The Chairman invited Mr. Thilak Godamanna to brief the Business Forum on progress made by the BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Thilak Godamanna thanked the Chairman and conveyed apologies of the President Mr. Chandra Embuldemiya, who could not be present. On behalf of Mr. Chandra, Mr. Godamanna gave the background of the formation of the Chamber on 30 November 2003 in Colombo and that the Chamber was hosted by The National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka. While he gave details of work done, he stated that the annual general meeting had been called for in 2004 and again in 2005 but could not be held as all members had not responded. He said that his chamber NCCSL had incurred direct expense of Rn 325,000 to maintain BIMSTEC Chamber Website. Funding was an issue.

In the discussions that followed, the Chairman raised the following:

- what are the reasons for the Chamber not being able to function

- funding support from institutional sources as subscription alone was inadequate
- BIMSTEC CCI was an important creation and needed activation. To re-look at composition and funding. Amend constitution to include all apex private national organization from member countries as primary members with equal rights. Also build role of BCCI in the Business Forum and the Economic Forum
- Form a Task Force to redraft the constitution time bound responsibility
- Hold the AGM together with a connected event to improve attendance at AGM.

9. Review of Trading Activities between BIMSTEC Countries

Ms. Dalad Kaewbaidhoon, Director, BIMSTEC Center, Thailand stated that trade between BIMSTEC was increasing respectively. She also highlighted BIMSTEC intra regional export and import value as well as top 5 export and import products among BIMSTEC members. In this remarks, BIMSTEC members could seek more trade and investment opportunity. She emphasized on setting up a permanent BIMSTEC secretariat in the near future.

10. Progress Report on BIMSTEC FTA

Mr. Vichai Maneesuwansin, Director Bureau of European, South Asian Middle East and African Affairs, Department of Trade Negotiations, Ministry of Commerce, Thailand updated the progress report on BIMSTEC FTA which has been set up Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) to conduct negotiation on BIMSTEC FTA. The committee took care of trade in services, economic regulations and cooperation. He informed that TNC next meeting will be held during 5-10 November 2006 in Myanmar.

11. Cooperation in the service sectors

Education – Dr. Charuayporn Torranin, Permanent Secretary for Education, Ministry of Education made the presentation on bilateral cooperation in education between Thailand and BIMSTEC members that could enhance the efficiency of education status in all economy. She said that Thailand had changed the education policy to teach English language as the second language and need the cooperation among BIMSTEC members to exchange the students especially in IT sector with India.

Medical and Health care – M.D. Surapong Ambhanwong, Director, Board of Trade of Thailand and Phayathai 2 Hospital gave a brief presentation related to case of Health Care in Thailand. He stated that Thailand was being the most well-known medical hub in Asia. As present, Thailand also tried to promote medical tourism for foreigners as the new health care opportunity. He focused on cooperation among BIMSTEC members to enhance strategy of being a regional hub of health care.

Construction – Mr. Aungsurus Areekul, Secretary General, Thai Contractors Association under H.M. The King's Patronage, mentioned the case of Infrastructure Development in Greater Mekong Sub-region. He showed the construction price index which Iron and Steel price was highly increasing from time to time. He stated that the new personal loan for housing has dramatically decreased since 2003.

Tourism – Ms. Roongthip Wongpatikarn, Chief of International Cooperation Section (C7), International Cooperation Section, Policy Planning Division, Planning Department, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) focused on the development and promotion for tourism in the region. In order to serve this objective, Plan of Action for Tourism Development and Promotion will be set up for the BIMSTEC region such as the formation of BIMSTEC Tourism Information Center, BIMSTEC Tourism Fund and BIMSTEC Working Group, etc. She also stated the future work plan in seeking mutual benefits and share experience in various types of tourism.

12. Progress Report on the BIMSTEC Business Visa

Mr. Komgrit Varakamin, Director, Visa and Travel Document Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that The First Expert Group Meeting on BIMSTEC Travel Card Scheme was held in Dhulikhel, Nepal, on 20-21 March 2006, this meeting discussed extensively about the possibility of launching the business card scheme in line with the one of APEC. As a way out, the meeting pursued on two alternatives to support travel facilitation. The first alternative is the visa exemption sticker which based on the principle of the SAARC visa exemption agreement. As for the second alternative, the business travel visa sticker was proposed that a common single visa is to be issued by embassies to businessmen after pre-clearance is done. The other options are the 3 years validity, the duration of three months for each visit. Thailand has started providing the business people of BIMSTEC and beyond with a new type of business visa called Non-Immigrant 'B' visa which was issued for multiple entry and was valid for three years.

13. Date and Venue of the Next Meeting

It was decided to hold the next Business Forum Meeting in New Delhi. India will inform the exact dates and other details.

BIMSTEC Business Forum : 26 October 2006 Meeting Recommendation

Introduction

Participation from all members except Bhutan and Nepal

Issues

1. Annual Meeting necessary, otherwise no interaction. Ensure each organization sends at least one representative.
2. Issue of a permanent Secretariat is important.
3. Linked to this is funding – some members have raised the need for transportation and hospitality. Member countries to consider contribution as well as seeking funding from ADB. This was the single biggest problem
4. Selection and rotation of Chairs have been made at the suggestion of members Governments. It is strongly recommended that selection of Chairs be based on the criteria of willingness and expertise.
5. The role and support of private sector in the FTA discussions as well as inclusion of Service sector was recommended.
6. Mechanism for exchange of information and data both accurate and timely was highlighted.
7. Connectivity within BIMSTEC was raised and a clear time line for the BIMSTEC Business Visa sought from the Economic Forum. Since there is a SAARC Business Visa in place, this needs to be looked at
8. While the BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce and Industry has been in existence for 3 years, its first AGM is yet to be held. Issues of membership to include all apex, national industry bodies in each member country with equal right and funding need to be resolved. Also, need to bring the BIMSTEC CCI into the field of the Business Forum as well as the Economic Forum.
9. Need to create awareness within member countries in BIMSTEC through PR exercise and flagship events like – annual Trade Fair, games/football matches etc. Hold the first trade fair in India in 2008.
10. Decision on the correct name – BIMSTEC or Bay of Bengal Initiative.
11. Next Business Forum meeting back to back with BIMSTEC Summit in New Delhi in February 2007. Also, AGM of BIMSTEC Chamber.
