

**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**