

REPORT OF THE 2nd MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC FORUM

COLOMBO, 17 DECEMBER 2002

The Second Economic Forum of the BIMST-EC Countries was held in Colombo on 17th December 2002. Government and private sector representatives from Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand participated in the Economic Forum. List of participants is at Annex 1. The adopted Agenda is at Annex 2.

The Acting Director General of the Department of Commerce of the Government of Sri Lanka Ms. Manel de Silva was elected to chair the Economic Forum.

Mr Harsha Wickremasinghe, Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Affairs of the Government of Sri Lanka, delivered the keynote address at the Economic Forum. He welcomed the participants and reiterated the need to strengthen the private & public sector participation in promoting the economic cooperation among the BIMST-EC countries. In relation to the future direction of BIMST-EC countries he reiterated, inter alia, the need to expedite the proposed FTA.

The Report of the Business Forum was presented by the Chairman Mr Chandra Embuldeniya for the consideration of the Economic Forum. The Economic Forum took note of the decision of the Business Forum to set up an interim secretariat for the Business Forum. The Economic Forum decided to transmit to the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) the following recommendations of the Business Forum for further action.

Setting up of BIMST-EC Chamber of Commerce
Importance of setting measurable targets/bench marks and result oriented action plans.
Holding of regular meetings through teleconferencing and the use of Internet.
Encouraging investment in services, education and health sectors.
Reactivating "Visit BIMST-EC Year" project.
Holding a business convention and a trade fair in Sri Lanka in August 2003.
Encouraging free flow of travel among BIMST-EC countries and providing entry visa on arrival.
Assuming common positions on WTO issues as far as possible.

It was also recommended that food festivals be organized in member countries to coincide with identified national festivals.

At the commencement of the meeting, delegates expressed their concern over the very slow progress of BIMST-EC activities. They noted that the BIMST-EC has not been able to satisfactorily achieve the desired objectives.

Delegates felt that the delays in project formulation and implementation were partly due to the inability of member countries to bring together representatives from all countries. It was recommended that the practice of having a minimum of three participating members be adopted as a standard arrangement in convening future Expert Group Meetings and in implementing BIMST-EC Projects.

The meeting also felt that the hosting of sectoral/sub sectoral Expert Group Meetings could also be conducted on a voluntary basis, with the approval of the concerned Lead/Chair country.

Member countries highlighted the importance of maintaining continuity in the affairs of the Economic Forum. Delegates then called for mechanisms for better coordination of activities undertaken by the member countries. It was agreed that the responsibility for co-ordination should be with the Economic Forum Chairperson. To that end, designated national focal points for various sectors and sub sectors would be required to submit quarterly progress reports to the Chairperson.

The possibility of developing Balance Score Cards to evaluate performances of Sectors/Sub Sectors from Lead/Chair countries was discussed. The National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka was requested to prepare a draft of a Balance Score Card for this purpose.

The Economic Forum endorsed the proposal that each member country to identify ten priority projects based on their needs. Such projects should be rationalized according to the requirements of the region. The Forum took note of bilateral and trilateral co-operation on air and land linkages among some BIMST-EC members and further encouraged such activities.

With regard to the ESCAP project profile on trade facilitation, the Economic Forum recommended the adoption of the ESCAP proposal taking into account the following:

- ESCAP build on the study to be undertaken by BIMST-EC on major land routes and border crossings.

- UNCTAD Institute of Trade and Development based in Thailand be used by members as a center for training/workshops and seminars on all topics pertaining to trade facilitation.

The Economic Forum recommended that the ESCAP report on textiles and clothing be reviewed by the Expert Group for the Sub Sector on textiles and clothing for formulating an Action Plan.

The Economic Forum appreciated the initiative taken by the National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka for developing a website for BIMST-EC Business Forum and recommended that guidelines be set for sponsorships. It was agreed that the proposed website would be managed initially by the Business Forum of BIMST-EC and later transferred to the BIMST-EC Chamber of Commerce when established. It would also provide a window for the Economic Forum and have links to member country websites.

It was decided to hold the next meeting in June 2003 or prior to the Senior Officials' Meeting in Colombo.

The delegates thanked the Government of Sri Lanka for hosting the second meeting of the Economic Forum and expressed deep appreciation for the excellent arrangements.