

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
LOK SABHA**

STARRED QUESTION NO:428

ANSWERED ON:25.08.2004

BIMST-EC SUMMIT

Nikhil Kumar Shri ;Rao Shri Kavuru Samba Siva

**Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:**

- (a) whether the Prime Minister attended the first Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand-Economic Co-operation (BIMST-EC) summit held recently in Bangkok;
- (b) if so, the details of discussions held therein;
- (c) the details of decisions taken particularly regarding the energy and tourism co-operation sector among the member countries;
- (d) whether India and six other Asian countries have decided to set up a joint working group on counter terrorism;
- (e) if so, the extent to which this working group is likely to be helpful to curb the menace of terrorism; and
- (f) the details of the year and venue that has been decided to hold the next summit?

**Answer**

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH)

(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f). A statement is placed on the Table of the House.

Statement referred to in parts (a) to (f) to the answer of Lok Sabha Starred Question No. 428 to be answered on 25.08.2004.

The Prime Minister attended the first BIMSTEC Summit held in Bangkok on July 31, 2004. PM (as well as the other BIMSTEC leaders) made a statement at the inaugural ceremony ( copy enclosed). During the discussions that followed, the leaders exchanged views on energy, tourism, poverty alleviation, protection of bio-diversity and traditional knowledge, traditional systems of medicine, generic drugs, combating international terrorism and transnational crimes etc. They also issued a Summit Declaration (copy enclosed).

2. The following offers were made by our Prime Minister at the Summit and accepted for implementation:

- a. India will host a Ministerial meeting on Energy Cooperation in 2005.
- b. India will organize a Round table and Workshop of Tourism Ministers and Travel and Tourism Industry Representatives in 2005.
- c. India will set up a BIMSTEC Center on Weather and Climate in New Delhi.
- d. India offered to share with member countries remote sensing data for agriculture, environment and disaster management.
- e. India offered 150 additional ITEC scholarships besides the 150 scholarships already offered during the Ministerial meeting in Feb, 2004.
- f. India offered 30 scholarships to the students of member countries for studying traditional systems of medicine in India.

3. Leaders were unanimous on the need to join hands to combat international terrorism. An important step in this direction is the setting up of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism. India agreed to host its first meeting later this year in New Delhi. Leaders pledged not to allow use of their territories by terrorist groups for launching attacks on friendly governments and agreed to share information and training programmes for capacity building.

4. Bangladesh will host a Ministerial meeting on poverty alleviation and women`s empowerment.

5. Bhutan will host a meeting on cultural cooperation.

6. Sri Lanka will host a meeting on biotechnology and intellectual property rights for traditional knowledge.

7. Thailand will host a meeting on protection of bio-diversity and traditional knowledge and promoting traditional systems of medicine

and facilitating access to affordable drugs.

8. At the request of all the participating countries, India agreed to host the Second BIMSTEC Summit in 2006.

Speech by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh at the Inaugural BIMST-EC Summit

31/07/2004

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I begin by congratulating the Prime Minister of Thailand for assuming the Chairmanship of the first BIMST-EC Summit and for his inspiring Opening address. I also wish to thank the Government of Thailand for its warm and gracious hospitality. This is my first overseas visit as the Prime Minister of India and I am gratified to be here in this beautiful land of Thailand. Mr. Chairman, yours is a country with which we have enduring and historical bonds and this occasion represents a new phase in a partnership, which has been mutually enriching. I take this opportunity to extend a very hearty welcome to Nepal and Bhutan as new members of BIMST-EC.

Excellencies, we in India view our quest for closer and mutually beneficial ties with all our neighbours as a logical response to the challenges with which contend. These challenges that we must address and overcome are varied and disparate. The world continues to be riven by poverty, inequity, disease and highly skewed access to resources at a time when science and technology have placed solutions within our reach. The global political environment fosters insecurity, making our task even more complex, and our endeavors more urgent. The intolerance bred by religious extremism can divide societies and people and we neglect it at our own peril. The scourge of terrorism is unfortunately one with which we all must grapple - as a global phenomenon and as an everyday reality. The areas of conflict are coming closer to us. But, Mr. Chairman we cannot stay our efforts. We have to work - we have to work for peace and for security, and to create a new climate in which we can concentrate on our primary responsibility - a better life for all our peoples. The solutions to some of these problems lie with Governments. Equally, we have to reach out beyond, to find imaginative answers to intractable issues. This is the way we have chosen in India. It is this perspective - that the many dimensions of the challenges we face can only be solved by working together that brings us here today in this beautiful city of Bangkok. A global order, which is better representative and more responsive to the needs of our times, must include the reform of the United Nations and a restructuring of the Security Council.

Excellencies, in that spirit, I deem it a privilege to be present on this occasion along with our close neighbours and friends representing the BIMST-EC countries. We belong to a region with many natural complementarities. Our bonds run deep in time, strengthened by strong economic, cultural and civilizational links. The colonial intervention over the last two centuries may have weakened these links somewhat, but has not in any way diminished the yearning of our people to revive them. We see BIMST-EC as a collective and effective forum for giving full expression to the widely rediscover the coherence of our region based on the commonality of many linkages around the Bay of Bengal.

Regional integration is not antithetical to globalisation, but can be a useful building block. Our collective endeavours can be more than the sum of our individual efforts. BIMST-EC offers us the hope and the opportunity to fulfil this imperative of our times. We consider our participation in BIMST-EC as a key element in our 'Look East Policy' and long standing approach of good neighbourliness towards all our neighbours - by land and sea.

The challenge before us is to transform the richness of our human and natural resources into cooperative regional activities promoting development, enhancing prosperity and the well-being of our people, and ensuring our collective security in all its multifarious dimensions.

We need to translate our inherent strengths of geographical contiguity into a community of prosperity and goodwill. Interconnectivity physical, economic or technological is of prime importance in building bridges of understanding. We can achieve this long-term vision of shared prosperity and growth through cooperative action based on dialogue and fostering mutual confidence, focussing on aspects that unite us.

Considerable progress has already been achieved in terms of a Framework Agreement on Free Trade and valuable expert-level studies under the six listed areas of cooperation. For instance, we consider the trilateral India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway proposal and the proposed Optical Fibre Telecommunication Link alongside the Highway as projects, which would have considerable importance in the BIMST-EC context.

For a region that is so richly endowed with energy resources, it is imperative that we address the need for their optimal utilization to meet our growing energy demands. In this context, India would be happy to host a Ministerial Conference on Energy Cooperation in the year 2005 to provide an impetus to our joint efforts in this area. The vagaries of climate and weather in our region concern us all. We have had floods in some places and drought in others. To enable all BIMST-EC countries to pool their scientific resources and to benefit from weather forecasting India is prepared to set up a BIMST-EC Centre on Weather and Climate in New Delhi. India would also be willing to share its expertise in remote sensing for agriculture, environment and disaster management.

To further explore the vast potential that exists for increasing tourism within our region, India proposes to host a Round Table and Workshop of Tourism Ministers of BIMST-EC countries, with the participation of tour operators, hotel representatives and others associated and with the tourism industry with the objective of at least doubling tourism within BIMST-EC region in the next five years.

We are also happy to announce 150 scholarships for next year under the ITEC Programme for BIMST-EC countries, in addition to the 150 scholarships offered by India at the Ministerial Meeting in Phuket in February this year. All our countries are richly endowed in traditional systems of medicine. Mr. Chairman, you referred to the vast potential of our herbal resources to find new remedies to HIV/AIDs. India offers 30 scholarships in this field to enable a productive partnership amongst BIMST-EC countries.

The statement to be issued on the conclusion of this Summit should reflect, as I am sure it will, the collective will of our Governments to carry forward the BIMST-EC vision of mutually beneficial regional cooperation through specific projects. Our mutual confidence would of course be greatly enhanced if we were able to forge a common front against terrorism, gunrunning, narcotics trafficking, which in varying degrees affect us all. Mr. Chairman, Thailand has played a pioneering role in bringing the BIMST-EC idea to fruition and we thank you for staying the course and for your leadership role. It is now our collective responsibility to carry it forward towards purposeful cooperation. In achieving the objectives of BIMST-EC, I would like to reaffirm India's firm political commitment to regional cooperation for mutual benefit and wholehearted support and cooperation with our BIMST-EC partners so that we succeed in our efforts to translate ideals into meaningful cooperation on the ground.

Thank you.

#### 1st BIMSTEC Summit Declaration

We, the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, the Prime Minister of the Union of Myanmar, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom Of Nepal, the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Prime Minister of The Kingdom of Thailand gathered in Bangkok, Thailand, on 31 July 2004 for the first BIMSTEC summit meeting;

Convinced that the geographical location of our countries and our rich natural and human resources provide a sound basis for mutually beneficial cooperation,

Recognizing that the pluralistic nature of our societies, our shared cultural heritage and the rich diversity of languages, arts, crafts and traditions provide ample opportunity for multi-dimensional cooperation within our region;

Convinced that regional and sub-regional economic cooperation such as ours contribute to efforts towards global free and fair trade being pursued under the multilateral trading regime,

Affirming that the above realities provide a firm foundation on which to build our partnership and overall cooperation;

Resolving to foster a sense of community that will lead to the economic and social development of the entire region;

Do hereby:

Agree that grouping shall henceforth be known as BIMSTEC or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.

Commit ourselves to the founding objectives and principles of BIMSTEC; to assess the challenges and opportunities for economic cooperation in our region; and to strengthen BIMSTEC's ability to find ways and means to realize those challenges and opportunities effectively and efficiently.

Note with satisfaction BIMSTEC's achievements so far, including the signing of the Framework Agreement for a BIMSTEC Free Trade Area, the launch of Visit BIMSTEC Year 2004-2005 and the year-long Plan of Action on tourism, the establishment of the BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce, the first BIMSTEC Youth Football Tournament held in Phuket, the establishment of the BIMSTEC Center in Bangkok, and a biomass gasifier plant in Myanmar, and pledge to move forward with renewed vigor.

Agree to focus on specific areas of cooperation, including but not limited to trade & investment, transport & communications, tourism, energy, human resources development, agriculture, fisheries, science & technology and people-to-people contact.

Agree to explore the expansion of BIMSTEC cooperation into the areas of culture, education, public health, protection of biodiversity and traditional knowledge, rural community development, small and medium-scale enterprise, construction, environment, information and communications technology, biotechnology, weather & climate research, natural disaster mitigation & management.

Agree to take all possible steps including timely completion of the Free Trade Area negotiations for realization of the full potential of BIMSTEC trade and investment, taking into account the special needs of individual member countries.

Recognize that future cooperation under BIMSTEC requires the development of key infrastructure, in particular transportation & communication linkages, to facilitate tourism, trade and investment and accordingly agree to strengthen and accelerate cooperation for developing concrete regional project proposals such as the ongoing negotiations on road linkages between the member countries.

Agree to promote sustainable and optimal energy utilization through development of new hydrocarbon and hydropower projects, interconnection of electricity and natural gas grids, energy conservation, and renewable energy technologies.

Agree to coordinate our diverse strengths in the tourism sector to drive maximum benefit from our natural, cultural and historical attractions, and recognize the need to enhance inter-regional tourism through such strategies as joint marketing of intra-BIMSTEC tourism packages, exchange of visits and information as well as sub regional tourism co-operation.

Agree to facilitate travel within the region for business travel, exchange programmes and tourism, including through the introduction of a BIMSTEC Business Travel Card/Visa.

Encourage the private sector to explore ways to tap the economic partnership potential of the member economies and make full use of BIMSTEC opportunities.

Agree to intensify cooperation to promote the sustainable use of the marine resources in the Bay of Bengal through effective management and conservation in close coordination with the already existing frameworks, including the Bay of Bengal Programme-Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO).

Agree to enhance technical cooperation aimed at capacity building, and recognize the potential for public and private organizations to expand existing cooperation in this area.

Express grave concern at the continuing threat of international terrorism and transnational crime that has adversely affected the economic and social progress of the peoples of the BIMSTEC region; recognize that the solidarity and friendship existing among member states could be utilized as a basis to counter this threat; agree, as an urgent priority, to co-ordinate our efforts to combat this menace, including through the exchange of information among concerned agencies, and other concrete programmes of co-operation, and resolve to continue active co-operation in ongoing efforts of the international community in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, by whosoever it is perpetrated irrespective of its cause of stated rationale.

Agree to coordinate our efforts to address, as a matter of priority, transnational issues that threaten the economic and social progress of the peoples of the BIMSTEC region, including HIV/AIDS and other threats to public health such as malaria, tuberculosis, and polio; and encourage active cooperation among concerned agencies, including through the exchange of information, sharing of experiences and other concrete programmes.

Decide to proactively promote increased interaction among our peoples through programmes, such as exchanges of parliamentarians, media persons, students and faculty, sports persons, as well as exchanges in the fields of performing arts and entertainment, such as motion pictures, television programmes and music.

Decide to accord priority to projects that could be clearly conceptualized, adequately funded and effectively implemented, with well-defined goals and tangible results relevant to the needs of our peoples, based, as far as possible, on internal financing from within the BIMSTEC countries.

Agree to streamline procedures and protocols to make BIMSTEC more efficient and output-based.

Agree that once a clear and focused programme of cooperation is in place, appropriate formal institutional mechanisms would be established, jointly and within each member country, for effective coordination and implementation.

Agree to task their Foreign Ministers with the responsibility of coordinating overall BIMSTEC cooperation.

We express our gratitude to the Government of Thailand for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements made for the Summit.