

Bimstec ministers to talk poverty, food security at Dhaka meet

Seven countries of the Bay of Bengal rim will plan a common agenda for agriculture development to ensure food security and measures at poverty alleviation at their first ministerial meeting here July 9.

The number of poor in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (Bimstec) region has gone up, even as the member nations have failed to come up with any worthwhile programme during the last decade, unnamed Bangladesh government sources preparing for the meet told New Age newspaper.

The member nations of this group of countries in South Asia and South East Asia are Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal.

The meeting is being held in the backdrop of global price hikes of food and energy, hurting the poor people of the region the most, the sources pointed out.

'Agriculture and food security will get prominence in the first-ever meeting on such an issue apart from climate change and its impact on the poor,' a high official of the Bangladesh foreign ministry told the newspaper.

The meeting is set to devise a guideline in that regard in view of changing scenario.

'A formal and institutional mechanism may need to be developed for strengthening the networking system among the member countries,' read the draft agenda of the meeting.

The draft stipulates that the member countries of the group are required to describe the strategies being followed with a view to ensure national and household food security. The meeting is expected to highlight importance of agriculture development to reduce influx of population from rural to urban areas by creating rural employment.

Asked about the slow progress of the Bismtec since its initiation in 1998, an official, who was involved in the process earlier, pointed out that potentials of the Bay of Bengal grouping could not be exploited due to 'lukewarm responses' from the member states, each assigned for particular sectors.

'The member countries have achieved substantially the goals of cooperation in trade matters as they showed interest in and contributed enthusiastically to the issue,' the official argued.

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