



**MESSAGE FROM H.E. MS. LATHA REDDY, AMBASSADOR OF INDIA**

**(BIMSTEC WORKING GROUP CHAIR)**

**'BIMSTEC Day – 6 June 2008'**

As the Chair of the BIMSTEC Working Group (BWG), I have great pleasure in sharing my thoughts on BIMSTEC on the occasion of the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the BIMSTEC.

It was more than a decade ago in June 1997 that Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand initiated the BIMSTEC process here in Bangkok. Myanmar joined later that year and Nepal and Bhutan joined in 2004. The grouping, which brings South and South East Asia closer, has come to be appropriately called the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.

BIMSTEC is emerging as an important framework for regional cooperation reflecting the political will of the seven countries to come together to equip their peoples to benefit from the opportunities offered by rapid globalization as also to jointly address common challenges. Our peoples are neighbours and share civilisational links. We have become increasingly aware of the mutual interdependence and interlinkages between our economies and societies and the potential benefits of closer cooperation.

We in the BIMSTEC have come a long way since 1997. Cooperation networks have been formed in a number of important areas. Regular interactions are being held at various levels. One Summit, six Ministerial meetings and eleven senior officials' meetings have been held so far. A number of other important sectoral Ministerial/expert level meetings have been held.

Issues such as greater connectivity, energy security, increased trade & investment, agriculture, tourism, environment, technology cooperation and security are all among the focus areas of active ongoing cooperation under the BIMSTEC framework. Many of these issues are interlinked and progress in all these areas would directly benefit the peoples of all our countries. It is a win-win situation. Serious beginnings have been made and we look forward to a rapid realization of our goals.

Our Ministers and Senior Officials are due to meet in New Delhi in August to discuss a whole range of issues. Increased transport linkages which will

benefit business, tourism and people-to-people contacts; trade facilitation through a possible FTA; cooperation in the fields of energy; tourism; counter-terrorism and the establishment of a Permanent Secretariat are among some of the issues that are likely to come up for discussion.

Later this year we will have the second BIMSTEC Summit in New Delhi. This would be another important milestone in providing direction to the future work of BIMSTEC as our political leaders at the highest levels will meet and take important decisions on the way forward for BIMSTEC.

I would like to thank all BWG members and the BIMSTEC Centre for their active participation and cooperation in our regular deliberations over the years (the 80<sup>th</sup> meeting was held last month), which has played a useful role in focusing attention on key issues of interest and to monitor progress.

I am confident that together we would be able to channel our energies and focus on the tasks ahead to help build a strong interconnected, cooperative and prosperous region of BIMSTEC.