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**BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL  
TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION**

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**FOURTH BIMSTEC SUMMIT DECLARATION**

**30-31 August 2018**

**Kathmandu, Nepal**

***“Towards a Peaceful, Prosperous and Sustainable Bay of Bengal Region”***

We, the Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, the Chief Advisor of the Kingdom of Bhutan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Prime Minister of Nepal, the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, and the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, met in Kathmandu on 30-31 August 2018 for the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit; and

*Reaffirming* the firm commitment to the principles and purposes of BIMSTEC as enshrined in the 1997 Bangkok Declaration;

*Recalling* the Third BIMSTEC Summit Declaration (Nay Pyi Taw, 4 March 2014) and the BIMSTEC Leaders’ Retreat Outcome Document (Goa, 16 October 2016);

*Affirming* the solemn commitment to making the Bay of Bengal Region peaceful, prosperous and sustainable by building on our common strengths through our collective efforts;

*Being convinced* that geographical contiguity, abundant natural and human resources, rich historical linkages and cultural heritage present great potentials for promoting deeper cooperation in identified core areas in the region;

*Recognizing* that eradication of poverty is the greatest regional challenge in realization of development objectives and expressing firm commitment to working together for the implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development;

*Acknowledging* that enhanced inter-linkages and inter-dependence within the economies and societies in the BIMSTEC Member States provide greater opportunity to advance regional cooperation;

*Underlining* the importance of multidimensional connectivity, which promotes synergy among connectivity frameworks in our region, as a key enabler to economic integration for shared prosperity;

*Taking into consideration* the importance of trade and investment as one of the major contributing factors for fostering economic and social development in the region.

*Recognizing* the special needs and circumstances of the least developed and land-locked developing countries in the region and underlining the necessity to provide meaningful support to their development process;

*Recognizing* that terrorism and transnational organized crimes continue to pose a great threat to international peace and security including in the BIMSTEC countries and stressing that combating terrorism and transnational organized crimes require sustained efforts and cooperation and comprehensive approach involving active participation and collaboration of the Member States;

*Reaffirming* strong commitment to making BIMSTEC a dynamic, effective and result-oriented regional organization for promoting a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Bay of Bengal Region through meaningful cooperation and deeper integration;

*Stressing* the need for a fair, just, rule-based, equitable and transparent international order and reaffirming faith in the multilateralism with the United Nations at the centre and the rule-based international trading system;

*Underscoring* the importance of robust institutional arrangements to effectively steering the process of regional cooperation under BIMSTEC;

*Taking Note* of the participation and concurrence by the Chief Advisor of the Interim Government of Bhutan to the Summit decisions and its outcome documents on an ad referendum basis, as these are subject to endorsement by the next elected government;

**Do hereby:**

1. *Recall* the principles enshrined in the 1997 Bangkok Declaration and reemphasize that cooperation within BIMSTEC will be based on respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit.
2. *Agree* to intensify our efforts to realize the objectives and purposes of BIMSTEC as embodied in the 1997 Bangkok Declaration, and reiterate our pledge to work collectively towards making BIMSTEC a stronger, more effective and result-oriented organization for achieving a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Bay of Bengal Region.
3. *Resolve* to achieve, leveraging on BIMSTEC's unique position as a bridge linking South and Southeast Asia, an enhanced level of economic and social development in the region, and remain fully committed to consolidate and deepen cooperation among Member States

towards transforming our organization into an effective platform to promote peace, prosperity and sustainability.

4. *Deplore* terrorist attacks in all parts of the world including in BIMSTEC countries and strongly condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations wherever and by whomsoever committed and stress that there can be no justification whatsoever for any act of terrorism. *Affirm* that the fight against terrorism should target not only terrorists, terror organizations and networks but also identify and hold accountable States and non-State entities that encourage, support or finance terrorism, provide sanctuaries to terrorists and terror groups and falsely extol their virtues. *Reiterate* our strong commitment to combat terrorism and call upon all countries to devise a comprehensive approach in this regard which should include preventing financing of terrorists and terrorist actions from territories under their control, blocking recruitment and cross-border movement of terrorists, countering radicalization, countering misuse of internet for purposes of terrorism and dismantling terrorist safe havens.
5. Repose our faith unequivocally in the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and strive to strengthen the multilateral system by reforming its rules, institutions and instruments to make it relevant to contemporary global challenges and agree to work together to present a collective voice to safeguard our collective interests for a fair, just, rule-based, equitable and transparent world order.

## **INSTITUTIONAL REFORM**

6. *Decide* to task the BIMSTEC Secretariat to prepare a preliminary draft of the charter for the organization, building on the 1997 Bangkok Declaration, defining a long-term vision and priorities for cooperation, clearly delineating roles and responsibilities of different layers of institutional structure and decision-making processes, for consideration by the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPWC) and other higher bodies with a view to adopting it by the Fifth Summit; and agree to task the BPWC to develop the Rules of Procedure (RoP) for the BIMSTEC Mechanisms.
7. *Decide* to establish a BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee to deal with administrative and financial matters of the Secretariat and the BIMSTEC Centers and Entities, as well as to prepare schedule of meetings, prioritize and rationalize the organization's activities.
8. *Direct* the relevant Ministries/national agencies of our respective governments to explore the possibility of establishing a BIMSTEC Development Fund (BDF), at an appropriate time, with voluntary contributions from the Member States, which will be utilized for research and planning of BIMSTEC and financing of projects, programmes and other activities of BIMSTEC Centers and Entities as agreed upon by the Member States.

9. *Agree* to enhance the institutional capacity of the BIMSTEC Secretariat, including through financial and human resources, in order to enable it to coordinate, monitor and facilitate implementation of BIMSTEC activities and programmes; and initiate project proposals as agreed by the Member States as well as fulfil any other responsibility entrusted to it in an effective and efficient manner and agree to raise the numbers of Directors to seven, one from each Member State, in a staggered manner.
10. *Acknowledge* the importance of enhancing the visibility and stature of BIMSTEC in international fora by, *inter alia*, forging common positions, as appropriate, on issues of common interest and seeking group recognition in various multilateral organizations, institutions and processes.
11. *Emphasize* the need to accelerate progress in the core areas of cooperation and to *review*, restructure and rationalize the existing areas of BIMSTEC cooperation and streamline the operational modalities for activities, implementation of programmes and projects under BIMSTEC for bringing out tangible results. Welcome Thailand's concept paper on the Reprioritization of BIMSTEC Pillars of Cooperation proposing to streamline to five pillars which will be subjected to further discussion in the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee.
12. *Agree* to take up on priority basis the legal documents and instruments that are pending for internal approval process for finalization and ratification.
13. *Commend* the role of Lead Countries for the progress made in the respective sectors, as annexed to this declaration, and encourage them to accelerate their efforts to make further progress.
14. *Express* our appreciation for former Secretary-General Mr. Sumith Nakandala's valuable contribution in advancing the work of BIMSTEC during his tenure and welcome the appointment of Mr. M. Shahidul Islam of Bangladesh as the Secretary General of BIMSTEC.
15. *Convey* deep appreciation to Nepal for the able stewardship of BIMSTEC from March 2014 and welcome Sri Lanka as the new Chair of BIMSTEC.
16. *Reiterate* the commitment to timely holding of Summit and other meetings of the BIMSTEC mechanisms to intensify the process of regional cooperation.
17. *Agree* to make our directives, commitments and statements of our positions on sectoral review expressed at the Annexure as part of this Declaration.
18. *Express* our sincere appreciation to the Government of Nepal for the warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements made for the Summit.

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**Sectoral Review**

**Poverty Alleviation**

1. *Reiterate* our commitment to the eradication poverty in the Bay of Bengal Region by 2030 in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and call for effective implementation of the BIMSTEC Poverty Plan of Action and for gearing up efforts of all sectors to contribute to the over-arching goal of poverty alleviation.
2. *Express* commitment to nurturing our workforce by taking concrete measures to provide decent job opportunities for them through increased investment in service and productive sectors of national economy.

**Transport and Communications (Connectivity)**

3. *Reiterate* our resolve to establish seamless multi-modal transportation linkages and smooth, synchronized and simplified transit facilities through the development, expansion and modernization of highways, railways, waterways, sea routes, airways in the region and direct our respective authorities to speed up their efforts to conclude the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement and the BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement as early as possible taking into account the special circumstances and needs of the Member States.
4. *Note* with satisfaction the preparation of the draft BIMSTEC Master Plan on Transport Connectivity and call for its early adoption and thank the Asian Development Bank for providing support to prepare the Master Plan and task the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group (BTCWG) to work out the modalities for its implementation, giving due attention to the special circumstances and needs of the Member States. We agree that the Master Plan would serve as a strategic document that guides actions and promotes synergy among various connectivity frameworks, such as the ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity 2025 (MPAC 2025), the Ayeyawady - Chao Phraya- Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), to achieve enhanced connectivity and sustainable development in our region.
5. *Decide* to establish a Working Group to deal with information technology and communications related matters with a view to provide greater access, more affordable and high-speed internet and mobile communications to the peoples of the region. In this regard, we welcome the offer of the Government of India to host a BIMSTEC Ministerial Conclave at the India Mobile Congress 2018 being held in New Delhi from 25-27 October 2018 on the theme “New Digital Horizons: Connect, Create, Innovate”, and encourage all Member States to participate in it.

## **Trade and Investment**

6. *Renew* our commitment to an early conclusion of BIMSTEC Free Trade Area (FTA) negotiations, and direct the BIMSTEC Trade and Economic Ministerial Meeting (TEMM) and its subsidiary bodies including the Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) to expedite finalization of all related Agreements of the BIMSTEC FTA as early as possible; and express our satisfaction on the progress of negotiation on the Agreement on Trade in Goods and the Agreement on Customs Cooperation and also direct our respective Ministries/Agencies to participate regularly in TNC Meetings.
7. *Agree* to revitalize the activities of BIMSTEC Business Forum and BIMSTEC Economic Forum to further strengthen Government–Private sector cooperation for the promotion of trade and investment and task the Expert Group on BIMSTEC Visa Matters to continue negotiation for finalization of the modalities for the BIMSTEC Visa Facilitation.
8. *Welcome* the offer of India to host a BIMSTEC Startup Conclave in December 2018, and encourage all Member States to participate in it.

## **Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime**

9. *Reiterate* our position that terrorism continues to pose a serious threat to peace and stability in our region and reaffirm our strong commitment to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and agree to taking appropriate measures in this regard.
10. *Look forward* to the signing of the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters; call upon the Member States for its early ratification and express satisfaction that many Member States have ratified the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking and call upon the remaining Member State to do so.
11. *Express* our determination to strengthen cooperation and coordination among the law enforcement, intelligence and security agencies; and decide to hold meetings at the level of BIMSTEC Home Ministers and continue with the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs meetings as part of promoting cooperation and coordination on counter terrorism and transnational crimes.
12. *Welcome* the offer of Thailand to host the Third Meeting of the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs in March 2019.

## **Environment and Disaster Management**

13. *Encourage* closer cooperation in disaster management through sharing of information, including early warning system, adoption of preventive measures, rehabilitation and capacity building and agree to build on the existing capacities in the region and decide to

establish an Inter-governmental Expert Group to develop a plan of action to improve preparedness and coordination for responding to natural disasters in the Bay of Bengal Region.

### **Climate Change**

14. *Express* our serious concerns over environmental degradation, adverse impact of climate change and global warming on the fragile Himalayan and mountain eco-systems and their inter-linkages with the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean and resolve to strengthen cooperation to protect and preserve the environment to address, *inter alia*, the adverse impact of climate change on the lives and livelihoods of our peoples; explore the possibility to establish an Inter-governmental Expert Group to develop a plan of action for collective response to climate change for the region; reaffirm our commitments to operationalize the Paris Agreement, in accordance with principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR & RC), taking into account different national circumstances and equity.

### **Energy**

15. *Recognize* the high potentials of energy resources in the region, particularly renewable and clean energy sources, and agree to expedite our efforts to develop a comprehensive plan for energy cooperation by working closely with each other within the region and decide to constitute an intergovernmental group of experts to enhance energy cooperation including in hydro-power and other sources of renewable energy.

16. *Remain* committed to providing uninterrupted and affordable power supply for the economic development of our peoples, including through energy trade; welcome the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection and instruct the relevant agencies to take concrete measures to initiate harmonization of technical, planning and operational standards for removing barriers to grid interconnections and also ensure early establishment of a BIMSTEC Grid and call for an early operationalization of the BIMSTEC Energy Centre in order to strengthen energy cooperation in the region.

### **Technology**

17. *Agree* to enhance cooperation for development, access and sharing of affordable technologies – including for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises for promoting sustainable development across sectors and welcome the efforts of the Member States towards the signing of the Memorandum of Association on the Establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Sri Lanka.

18. *Also agree* to focus cooperation in human resources development and education for the advancement of technology in the region, keeping in mind the need to address the disruptive impacts of technology

### **Agriculture**

19. *Decide* to deepen cooperation in the agricultural and allied sectors, including crops, livestock and horticulture, farm machinery and harvest management so as to increase productivity and profitability of agricultural produce in a sustainable manner; task the relevant authorities to intensify cooperation to attain food and nutritional security; and preserve and promote knowledge about traditional farming by appropriately linking both traditional and modern farming, and reducing costs, enhancing income and mitigating risks for farming communities, with the objective of facilitating agricultural trade among member countries and making contribution to the poverty alleviation, job creation, and improvement of quality of life of the masses in our nations.

20. *Welcome* the offer of Myanmar to host the 1<sup>st</sup> BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture by 2019 and the offer of India to host the BIMSTEC Seminar on Climate Smart Farming Systems in 2019.

### **Fisheries**

21. *Stress* on continued cooperation in conservation, management and sustainable use of marine resources in the region; agree to deepen cooperation in fisheries to ensure food security and improve livelihoods of people in our region and task the relevant national agencies to explore the possibility of meaningful collaboration to promote sustainable marine fisheries and direct the relevant authorities to explore how the landlocked Member States can benefit from inland fisheries.

### **Public Health**

22. *Agree* to expand cooperation in our efforts to address non-communicable diseases as well as trans-national public health issues that threaten the economic and social progress of the peoples of BIMSTEC region, including HIV and AIDS, malaria, dengue, tuberculosis, viral influenza-including avian and swine influenza and other emerging public health threats; note the progress in traditional medicine cooperation; remain committed to continuing the collaborative activities in this field; encourage active cooperation among concerned agencies including in the area of traditional medicine through exchange of information, sharing of experience, training of personnel and other concrete programmes to prevent and contain them; and express appreciation to Thailand for their efforts for cooperation in traditional medicine.



## **People-to-People Contacts**

23. *Resolve* to build a deeper understanding and trust among Member States and promote people-to-people contacts at various levels; note with satisfaction the activities of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks (BNPTT) in enhancing public awareness about BIMSTEC and direct the relevant agencies to finalize the terms of reference (ToR) of BNPTT.
24. *Agree* to explore possibility of establishing appropriate BIMSTEC forums for parliamentarians, universities, academia, research institutes, cultural organizations and media community to expand the scope of people-to-people contacts.

## **Cultural Cooperation**

25. *Emphasize* the need to enhance cultural exchange among Member States to further strengthen the historic cultural ties among our peoples; promote mutual respect and tolerance for cultural diversity; underscore the importance of Buddhism as a connecting thread in the region; and remain committed to giving a clear manifestation to this by establishing a Buddhist Circuit.
26. *Agree* to hold meetings of BIMSTEC Cultural Ministers and BIMSTEC Cultural Festival at regular intervals; welcome the offer of Bangladesh to hold the 2<sup>nd</sup> BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Culture and 1<sup>st</sup> BIMSTEC Cultural Festival; and strongly encourage our respective Cultural Ministers to participate in these two important events.

## **Tourism**

27. *Agree* to take concrete steps to promote intra-BIMSTEC tourism; task the relevant authorities to devise strategies considering the emerging opportunities and building on the past initiatives including the “Plan of Action for Tourism Development and Promotion for the BIMSTEC Region” adopted in Kolkata in 2005 and reinforced by the 2<sup>nd</sup> BIMSTEC Tourism Ministers Round Table and Workshop in Kathmandu in 2006; agree to take concrete measures to facilitate tourism by ensuring safety and security of tourists, and smooth transport connectivity; reaffirm our commitment to developing and promoting Buddhist Tourist Circuit, Temple Tourist Circuit, ancient cities trail, eco-tourism and medical tourism; and welcome the offer of Nepal to host a BIMSTEC tourism conclave in Nepal in 2020, coinciding with the Visit Nepal Year 2020.

## **Mountain Economy**

28. *Underscore* the necessity of making concrete efforts to ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their bio-diversity in order to support sustainable development; welcome the concept note on promoting mountain economies in BIMSTEC

countries developed by Nepal to promote cooperation in this area; and decide to establish an Inter-governmental Expert Group to develop an action plan.

### **Blue Economy**

29. *Emphasize* the importance of blue economy and agree to cooperate in this sector for the sustainable development in the region and decide to establish an Inter-governmental Expert Group to develop an action plan on blue economy, keeping in mind the special needs and circumstances of the landlocked Member States.

30. *Note* with satisfaction the hosting of International Blue Economy Conference in Bangladesh in 2017 with participation of government representatives from BIMSTEC Member States.

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