

**79th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
(UN ESCAP)
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**Agenda item 2(b)
Strengthening subregional cooperation -
Subregional perspectives on
“Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development”**

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates;
Ladies & Gentlemen.

Good Afternoon!

It is an honour for BIMSTEC to be included in this important dialogue on Strengthening subregional cooperation on “accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development” at the 79th Session of ESCAP.

BIMSTEC – The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation – is a fairly young intergovernmental organization consisting of seven countries – five countries from South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) and two countries from Southeast Asia (Myanmar and Thailand).

All our countries are considered most vulnerable to the impact of climate change.

This includes environment risks and a range of hazards such as floods, droughts, cyclones, heatwaves, wildfires, unpredictable rainfall, changing monsoon patterns, and glacial lake outbursts. The region has already begun to experience many of these climate shocks. It is no longer theory, or speculation.

The BIMSTEC region is home to about 1.7 billion of the world’s population. This means that 22 percent of the population of the world living in the BIMSTEC region are extremely vulnerable to economic loss, displacement, and diminished living conditions caused by

climate change. What makes things worse is, that a considerable number of people in this region are already some of the world's poorest and therefore extremely vulnerable.

The **BIMSTEC Charter** which was adopted last year on the 30th of March during the 5th BIMSTEC Summit identifies cooperation to combat Climate Change as one of the purposes of BIMSTEC. Moreover, recognizing the critical importance of addressing Climate Change collectively, the 5th Summit also approved a decision by the BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting to make '**Environment and Climate Change**' **one of the seven main sectors of cooperation in BIMSTEC** with Bhutan being the lead country to coordinate cooperation in this sector. The Summit also endorsed the **establishment of a BIMSTEC Joint Working Group for Environment and Climate Change** as the key mechanism to coordinate efforts in this important sector.

Excellencies,

It is clear that accelerating climate action is essential for sustainable development and achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. As the UN Secretary General keeps stressing, climate change is an **existential** challenge. The consequences would be devastating for all of us. If left unaddressed, several parts of our planet would become uninhabitable; and for many, especially in our region, it would mean a death sentence. The science is clear, and so is common sense. But, Climate Change Challenges cannot be successfully addressed by any country on its own. Therefore, I am grateful to UNESCAP for focusing on the need to strengthen sub regional cooperation.

Excellencies,

The BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Environment and Climate Change has started developing a "BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Environment and Climate Change". And, as you all know, individual countries have their own climate action plans to cut emissions and adapt to climate impacts through Nationally Determined Contributions. However, we all know that these are not sufficient to meet the 1.5 Celsius target set out in the Paris Agreement. Yet, even to achieve the Nationally Determined Contributions; and to achieve the BIMSTEC Action Plan targets that are being formulated; countries need help.

While BIMSTEC's very purposes enshrined in the Charter include cooperation to combat Climate Change, and BIMSTEC has also signed Memoranda of Understanding with the Asian Development Bank and the International Food Policy Research Institute which enables BIMSTEC to obtain some form of support in meeting BIMSTEC's climate related targets that include the SDG 13 targets, this is sadly insufficient.

The countries that make up the Bay of Bengal region or BIMSTEC are not only some of the most vulnerable; they also vary in the levels of state capacity for disaster relief and human security promotion. BIMSTEC may have the will, but lacks the financial capacity required to carry out the steps required to realize climate related adaptation, as well as disaster risk management (DRM). Therefore, I urge ESCAP, as well as other organizations and countries present here today to consider ways of cooperating with BIMSTEC and supporting BIMSTEC as it sets out in drawing up its Plan of Action on Environment and Climate Change.

The World Bank Group, for example, has a South Asia Climate Roadmap that is aimed at helping the region ramp up its climate action in key transitions.

I hope that similarly, international organizations would come forth to work with the Bay of Bengal countries that make up BIMSTEC – consisting of both **South and Southeast Asian countries**– to address climate change related challenges.

Strengthening sub regional, regional, inter-regional, and international cooperation is essential to generate solutions to Climate Change Challenges, and to save our Planet.

Thank you.