

**Special Remarks by  
Mr. Tenzin Lekphell, Secretary General of BIMSTEC  
at the Special Session of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks (BNPTT)**

**Bangkok, Thailand (virtual), 08-09 May 2023**

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Mr. Rachai

Director, Department of International Economic Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand

Dr. Surat

Director of the Indian Studies Centre of the Chula-longkorn University of Thailand

Distinguished Members of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks

Officials representing the BIMSTEC National Focal Points of Member States

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning.

It is a pleasure for me to join you today at this Special Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks.

My priority today, is to actually listen and hear your opinions and suggestions - and see how the Secretariat together with Member States, can help to incorporate your suggestions, ideas, and proposals in the work of BIMSTEC.

I am glad that representatives of the National Focal Points from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the respective Member States are also joining us today. This is an important step as BIMSTEC is a state-led and government driven organisation. In this context, it is necessary for the representatives of National Focal Points to hear what the BNPTT members have to say. The National Focal Points play a critical role in taking key decisions that drive BIMSTEC forward.

I want to thank the Government of Thailand and in particular - the Chulalongkorn University of Thailand for organising this Special Session of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks. I want to also thank all the Members of the BIMSTEC Think Tanks and the representatives of the National Focal Points for their participation in this important session.

Friends & Distinguished Delegates,

It was as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> BIMSTEC Summit in 2008 - that our Leaders recognised the importance of efforts to promote people-to-people contact, and decided to establish a BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks. In this context, it is heartening to see the BNPTT meet in a Special Session, and I hope that this will provide the BNPTT process -fresh impetus to function with renewed vigour in the months and years to come.

I also hope that Member State Governments will find ways to work more closely with the BNPTT process to accelerate BIMSTEC's regional cooperation and integration efforts. In this regard, I wish to echo the call by the BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers at their 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting held recently in March this year, directing the National Focal Points to attend the BNPTT meetings on a regular basis.

Friends,

The themes that have been selected by the BNPTT for this Special Session, are important ones - and they are:

- The humanitarian and economic tragedies linked to COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis;
- Transnational challenges – both traditional and non-traditional insecurity;
- New Cold War; and
- Sustainable Consumption.

These themes, in fact, capture the predicament and issues that the entire world is faced with in present times, and not just the BIMSTEC region.

Most often, the agenda-setting of our “subject-specific” or “sector-specific” inter-governmental BIMSTEC meetings that are largely scripted, don’t allow for discussion of the range or nature of issues that the BNPTT could address, and has incorporated into its agenda for this Special Session. The freedom of agenda setting and the freedom of discussion and exchange of views - on a wide range of crosscutting issues is an advantage that is unique to the BNPTT process which is not available to the BIMSTEC inter-governmental sectoral meetings. Therefore, the BNPTT process is invaluable and can be of significant value to BIMSTEC’s successful growth and evolution.

Friends,

The challenges that have been identified for this Meeting are inter-linked and complex. Each of the themes point to the need for greater cooperation among States. Yet, the world as a whole seems to be shifting towards further fragmentation instead of cooperation. It is critical therefore, for countries in this region to strategise on how best to work together - to ensure that we meet our socioeconomic and development goals.

I look forward most eagerly to listen to all of you; and I wish your deliberations all success.

Thank you.