

**Statement by BIMSTEC Secretary General  
at the 6th BIMSTEC Summit  
(04 April 2025, Bangkok, Thailand)**

Excellencies,

Honourable Prime Minister of Thailand, Madame Chair of BIMSTEC, Honourable Leaders of our member States, Honourable Ministers, distinguished delegates,

Good Morning, Namaskar, Sawasdee krub!

I join BIMSTEC Leaders in expressing, on behalf of the Secretariat, my heartfelt condolences, to the Governments and Peoples of Myanmar and Thailand, for loss of thousands of precious lives, injuries and devastating damages due to earthquake a week ago. I thank our members, Bangladesh, India and Thailand, for their prompt earthquake relief supplies to Myanmar.

I join the BIMSTEC member States, in thanking the Chair, for convening 6<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit, making excellent arrangements for the Summit and the related meetings, and extending warm hospitality, to the Secretariat.

I thank the Leaders of the BIMSTEC member States, for their kind statements, which reflected their abiding commitment to transforming BIMSTEC into a vibrant and capable regional organisation. The Secretariat warmly welcomes, the proposals and initiatives, outlined by the BIMSTEC Leaders in their statements, which will help expand and strengthen regional cooperation under BIMSTEC. The Secretariat has taken note, of the views, priorities, proposals and initiatives, outlined in the statements of BIMSTEC Leaders, and it will work together, with the member States, towards their implementation. We warmly welcome the reiterations of support, for the BIMSTEC Secretariat.

There's hope and expectation that 6th BIMSTEC Summit will provide a new momentum to regional cooperation under BIMSTEC. BIMSTEC was born in Thailand, almost 28 years ago, with Bangkok Declaration. Thailand was also the host of the first BIMSTEC Summit in 2004. And today in Bangkok, we will adopt BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030, the first ever Vision Document of BIMSTEC, which will provide a roadmap for next over 5 years.

I join the BIMSTEC Leaders in commending the exemplary leadership of the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand, for taking significant initiatives, since the 5th Summit, aimed at expanding cooperation under BIMSTEC and strengthening its institutional framework. Allow me to highlight key developments since Colombo Summit, under Thai Chair:

- i. Entry in Force of BIMSTEC Charter in May 2024;
- ii. Delineation of BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030, which we will be adopting today;
- iii. Finalization of the Rules of Procedure for BIMSTEC Mechanisms, which will be approved today;

- iv. Initiation of a new mechanism of BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers Retreats;
- v. Convening of Inaugural Informal Meeting of Foreign Ministers on the sidelines of the UNGA, which was hosted and chaired by India;
- vi. Conclusion of the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation, which has just been signed;
- vii. Establishment of the Eminent Persons' Group; and
- viii. Initiation of the BIMSTEC Home Ministers and Health Ministers Mechanisms.

As regards progress in sectoral cooperation, during past 3 years, since the 5th Summit held in Colombo in March 2022, the Secretariat has already shared, my detailed Report with the member States. Further, we have placed before you, a copy of my updated Report. It provides a summary of the developments, since the 5th Summit. Allow me to highlight significant developments in various sectors:

In Trade, Investment and Development Sector, we have concluded the process for establishment of an Expert Group on Fiscal and Monetary Policy. The 1st BIMSTEC Business Summit was convened by Confederation of Indian Industries, in New Delhi in August 2024. The Indian Chamber of Commerce hosted a BIMSTEC Business Conclave, in Kolkata in October 2023. However, there was no significant progress in negotiation of the 6 constituent agreements, under the Framework Agreement on BIMSTEC FTA, which was signed in 2004, 21 years ago.

As regards Environment and Climate Change Sector, implementation of the Plans of Action on Environment and Climate Change as well as Mountain Economy has commenced. We have also submitted our application for Observer Status at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

As regards Security Sector, the 4th Meeting of National Security Chiefs, which was held, in Retreat format in Nay Pyi Taw in July 2024, provided a new momentum to cooperation, in counterterrorism, maritime security and cyber security domains. With conclusion of the procedure for establishment of Home Ministers' Mechanism, we are poised to convene the first meeting of BIMSTEC Home Ministers. We have also succeeded in finalization of a five-year Action Plan for BIMSTEC Cyber Security Cooperation and a Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking. Unfortunately, the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, has not yet entered into force, 3 years after its adoption at Colombo Summit. I have been assured by two remaining member States that they would soon ratify it.

In Energy Sector, the procedural steps for setting up BEC in Bengaluru, India, have been completed, and it's ready to become operational. However, there has been no significant progress, during past 3 years, in implementation of the project, for inter-connection of electricity grids.

In Disaster Management, we have achieved operationalization of BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate, which has been set up in Noida, India. We have also been able to finalise Draft Guidelines for Maritime Component of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). We hope to soon finalise our Plan of Action for disaster management. The proposal of India to establish BIMSTEC Disaster Management Centre is a welcome initiative. India has already shared draft MoA for establishing the Centre.

As regards Agriculture and Food Security Sector, 2nd BIMSTEC Agriculture Ministers Meeting, which was held in virtual mode, in India in November 2022, provided the much needed push for implementation of the Plan of Action, including convening of 7 capacity building workshops and training programs. The Proposal of India to establish BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence for Agriculture Cooperation, in India, is a significant initiative.

Enhancing People-to-People Contacts has always been given a high priority. 2nd Meeting of the Working Group on Tourism, was held in Kathmandu in January 2024 and Sri Lanka hosted its 3rd Meeting last month in Colombo. We're looking forward to Bangladesh hosting the 2nd Meeting of Tourism Ministers and Secretaries this year, after a gap of 18 years.

Similarly, 2nd Meeting of the Expert Group on Cultural Cooperation, was held in Kathmandu, in March 2024, almost 18 Years after its first Meeting. We are looking forward to Bangladesh hosting the 2nd Meeting of Ministers and Secretaries for Culture, again after a gap of 18 years. I welcome the proposal of Nepal, the lead member State for culture and tourism sectors, to set up a BIMSTEC Centre for culture and tourism.

As regards enhancing youth exchanges, I would like to appreciate India for organizing, the 1st BIMSTEC Sports event, BIMSTEC Aquatic Championship, in New Delhi, in February 2024, and the 1st BIMSTEC Youth Summit, in Gandhinagar in February 2025. I welcome India's offer to organise more BIMSTEC youth and sports events in future.

The 4th Meeting of Expert Group on Visa Matters, which was held in Kathmandu in November 2024, after 17 years, agreed to explore measures for facilitation of visa amongst the BIMSTEC member States. During this period, two Meetings of BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks, were convened. Unfortunately, the process for setting up BIMSTEC Association of Parliamentarians could not be completed.

In vital Sector of Science, Technology and Innovation, we have been able to finalise the Plan of Action for 2023-27. We have also been able to finalise Plans of Action for Health and Human Resource Development Sectors. Having received concurrence of all the member States on the MoA for establishing TTF, we are ready to move forward with conclusion of HCA to make TTF operational. I welcome India's proposals in space sectors, training programmes and capacity building.

We have secured approval of all the member States for Institutional Arrangement for Financial Support from the World Bank for Implementation of the Plan of Action on Public Health 2023- 2025. The World Bank has offered a \$ 4.0 million grant for a project on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response, which is expected to be implemented soon. I welcome the proposal of Thailand to establish a BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence on Tropical Medicine and Public Health. We're looking forward to Sri Lanka hosting the first Meeting of BIMSTEC Health Ministers. I welcome India's proposal for Centre of Excellence in Traditional Medicine.

In Connectivity Sector, we have been able to conclude the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation. We have also been working on finalizing SOPs to implement this Agreement. There has been incremental progress, in implementation of the Master Plan for Transport Connectivity, which was adopted at Colombo Summit. I hope that the Working Group, tasked to negotiate the MVA, will hold its 2nd Meeting soon. India's proposal to establish BIMSTEC Sustainable Maritime Transport Centre is a welcome step. India has already shared draft MoA for establishing the Centre.

As regards progress in relationship with our external partners, ADB, over longstanding partner, has approved \$ 1.0 million Technical Assistance grant for 2025 and 2026. We signed a MoU with IFPRI in March 2023, and we have convened with it, a couple of capacity building events.

In a significant development, we signed yesterday MoUs with two more external partners, UNODC and IORA. We hope to sign soon, MoU with the WB, which has already been approved by our member States.

The Secretariat has been engaged in outreach to a number of other relevant regional, UN and International Organisations like ASEAN, CDRI, ISA, WIPO, WHO, WMO, ITU, UNDP, UNDRR, UN Women and UNCTAD etc. with a view to leverage their knowledge, experience, resources and programmes and CDRI, ISA, ITU and WIPO have already offered specific capacity building projects.

It has been pointed out that BIMSTEC has not been able to achieve the desired progress in forging tangible cooperation in various sectors. The need to reform and revitalise BIMSTEC has been stressed by the member States. I have shared with Honourable Ministers and Senior Officials, of our member States, during their meetings held earlier, the factors behind, less than desired progress, in forging regional cooperation, under BIMSTEC, particularly the long delays in implementation of the decisions and directives of the BIMSTEC Summits and Ministerial Meetings. The EPG has I have proposed a number of steps, to overcome institutional challenges. I hope our member States will take requisite steps to implement it.

I am grateful to the member States for acknowledging the role that the Secretariat has been playing in implementation of BIMSTEC's Agenda and extending their support to it. In spite of its limited resources, the Secretariat has taken a number of initiatives, since January 2024, to better assist the member States.

- we have started the practice of seeking Ministerial and Senior Officials approvals on important matters through circulation; and
- Submission of annual and half-yearly reports and reminds on progress in various Sectors;
- We have created of 3 specialised units in the Secretariat: an implementation support unit to monitor implementation of the decisions taken at the Summits and Ministerial Meetings; a Policy Support Unit to prepare Sectoral Background Papers and Notes with a view to make sectoral meetings more fruitful; and a Project Management Unit in order to enable the Secretariat to undertake implementation of projects offered by external partners like the world bank;

- We have engaged in outreach to relevant UN, International and Regional Organisations, with a view to exploring opportunities for partnerships with them; and
- Outreach to media and academic institutions of our member States as well as think; and
- Enhanced public communication through our website and social media platforms;

As we reform and revitalize BIMSTEC, with a view to deepening cooperation, I request the member States, to consider expansion of the Secretariat. At functional level, besides me, the Secretariat has, 7 Directors and 7 Lead Specialists, excluding the Secretarial and Admin staff members and support personnel.

I conclude by drawing your kind attention, to the fact that BIMSTEC will complete 30 years, in June 2027. I urge the member States to make it a landmark year in BIMSTEC's history by ensuring substantial progress, in all the sectors on our Agenda. I urge Honourable BIMSTEC Leaders to direct not only their Ministries of Foreign Affairs but also all the other Ministries to make cooperation under BIMSTEC, a high priority. I thank you for your kind indulgence and attention.

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