




The Prime Minister
**PRIME MINISTER
FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF NEPAL**

Message

I am pleased to learn that the BIMSTEC is going to be inaugurated in the first week of September, 2014 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It was long felt that the establishment of the Secretariat was necessary for moving the regional cooperation under BIMSTEC in an effective manner. It is a matter of great satisfaction that our decision at the Third BIMSTEC Summit held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 04 March 2014 has ultimately resulted in the birth of the Secretariat.

The BIMSTEC region is full of potentials in terms of human and natural resources, geographical diversity, cultural richness and linkages among the peoples, offering a great scope for its development through cooperation among the countries of this region. It is home of 20 per cent of the world's population and has huge diverse physical landscapes, ranging from the oceanic depths to the Mount Everest. The richness of the resources and closeness of the countries of the regions demands that we work together and expedite the process of cooperation on agreed areas, including education, culture, tourism, information technology, and people-to-people contacts to make BIMSTEC more relevant to the life of our peoples in the region.

We live in an increasingly interdependent and interconnected world in which peace, stability and prosperity are intertwined. Nepal's engagement in BIMSTEC with unflinching commitment to its aims and purposes is in line with the common resolve of the countries of this region for achieving economic growth, prosperity and happiness for our peoples. I am confident that BIMSTEC Secretariat can serve as an important instrument towards this end. As the current Chair of BIMSTEC, Nepal is ready to extend all possible cooperation to the smooth and effective functioning of the BIMSTEC Secretariat. I thank the Government of Bangladesh for hosting the BIMSTEC Secretariat and hope that the establishment of the Secretariat will help make the regional cooperation process more effective and beneficial for the countries of this region.

I extend my best wishes for the success of BIMSTEC Secretariat.

Sushil Koirala




**PRIME MINISTER
KINGDOM OF THAILAND**

Message

BIMSTEC, originally called BIST-EC, was established in Bangkok 17 years ago. Since its inception, BIMSTEC has gained dynamism and cooperation has expanded in many areas. The first BIMSTEC Summit was hosted by Thailand on 31 July 2004. Thailand has also since then provided a regular platform for dialogue through our hosting of a number of BIMSTEC Working Groups.

In Thailand's view, BIMSTEC has played a pivotal role in building bridges of friendship between South Asia and Southeast Asia, bringing our two regions closer together. On behalf of the Royal Thai Government, Thailand welcomes and fully supports the establishment of the BIMSTEC Secretariat. Thailand also wishes to express our sincere gratitude to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh as host government.

The inauguration of the Secretariat certainly marks a new page in BIMSTEC's history. Thailand believes that the Secretariat will help strengthen BIMSTEC's coordination, intensify cooperation and ensure continuity. To that effect, Thailand looks forward to working with the Secretariat and stands ready to extend our full support. It is our sincerest hope that BIMSTEC will continue to grow from strength to strength and achieve all of the goals it has set out - a truly shared prosperity for us all that would endure for centuries from today.

General Prayut Chan-o-cha



**STATE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH**

Message

On this auspicious occasion of the inauguration of the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka, it gives me immense pleasure to extend my warm greetings and best wishes to the government and the people of BIMSTEC Member States. Please allow me to express my deep appreciation for their continued support and cooperation in our effort to operationalize the BIMSTEC Secretariat.

BIMSTEC was born on 6 June 1997 with a view to improving the living standard of the people of the region through mutual cooperation and collective efforts. It bridges SAARC and ASEAN - the two most dynamic regions in the world. It has lot of commonalities and huge natural resources, which if exploited prudently, could considerably contribute to the socio-economic development of the region. There is enough scope to forge strong cooperative relations among the member states in the fields of trade and investment, connectivity, energy, food security, agriculture and climate change. However, we need to demonstrate a strict adherence to the articulated vision of BIMSTEC and move forward together. If we can do so, I strongly believe that BIMSTEC will significantly add to the efforts of the Government in turning Bangladesh into a middle income country by realizing its "Vision 2021".

Despite making considerable progress in various areas of cooperation, the need for a Secretariat has long been felt. The dream of having a Secretariat for the BIMSTEC is now a reality. I believe the Secretariat will act as a strong platform for coordination and cooperation with the Member States and add new impetus to the BIMSTEC process to achieve its goals set by the leaders.

I avail of this opportunity to extend my warm felicitations to H. E. Mr. Sumith Nakandala - the first Secretary General of BIMSTEC. I believe that, given his dynamic leadership, he will be able to steer the organization from the front in achieving its eventual goals. I wish the BIMSTEC Secretariat all the success in its endeavours.

Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu,
May Bangladesh live forever.

Md. Shahriar Alam, MP

BIMSTEC: A Window of Opportunity for Win-Win Cooperation

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It is reckoned that deepening and broadening of five connectivities are key to BIMSTEC-wide integration: trade connectivity, transport connectivity, investment connectivity, energy connectivity and people to people connectivity. These should be seen as key drivers that could transform BIMSTEC into a vibrant regional grouping.

It is encouraging to see that, through successive expert group discussions, ministerial meetings and summits, BIMSTEC has been able to set concrete targets it would like to achieve in near and medium term future. If BIMSTEC is to realize its ambition of undertaking a transformative journey, it will need to speedily implement the initiatives and actions it has identified for itself.

Initiatives under the BIMSTEC

BIMSTEC has taken a number of important initiatives, and some new ones are being considered, with a view to deepening cooperation among the member countries. These cover a wide range of areas. The third BIMSTEC Summit held on 4 March 2014 in Nay Pyi Taw was a milestone in this regard, with concrete steps envisioned for institutionalization of the BIMSTEC architecture (establishment of Permanent Secretariat), deepening of sector-specific cooperation (in areas of poverty alleviation and health) and joint initiatives for delivery of public goods (particularly as regards climate change).

The declaration establishing BIST-EC set out its basic objective as 'creation of enabling environment for rapid economic development through identification and implementation of specific projects in the sectors'. The aim was to 'promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, technical and scientific fields'. The second Ministerial Meeting in December 1997 selected six specific areas for cooperation: Trade and Investment; Technology; Transport and Communication; Fisheries; Energy and Tourism. The idea was to identify specific cooperation projects in each of these areas and implement those through concrete steps. Participation of the private sector was envisaged to play an important role in such endeavors. Later on, a number of other sectors were added: Agriculture, Cultural Cooperation; Environment and Disaster Management, Public Health; People-to-People Contact; Poverty Alleviation; Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime; Climate Change. Members were entrusted with the responsibility of taking the lead in particular areas. For example, Bangladesh is the lead country for "Trade and Investment" and "Climate Change".

Whilst BIMSTEC's primary goal is to promote region-wise cooperation, the idea is also to take up collaborative projects on sub-regional basis with a view 'to make use of best available synergies'. The institutional architecture of the BIMSTEC envisages Specialized Task Forces, Working Group Meeting, Senior Officials' Meeting, Ministerial Meeting and Summit which are tasked to ensure implementation of the identified activities. Summit is the highest policymaking body and the apex forum of BIMSTEC. Successive summits have played a crucial role by extending the needed political support in this regard.

A key ambition of BIMSTEC is to establish a free trade area, the BIMSTEC-FTA. The Framework Agreement on BIMSTEC-FTA covers trade in services and investment in addition to trade in goods. This gives BIMSTEC cooperation a distinct flavor. The framework requires member countries to conduct negotiations on a positive list approach. The schedule of tariff reduction envisages both fast track and normal track tariff liberalization, differentiated for non-LDCs and LDCs, with rules of origin and maximum ceiling of products in the negative list.

Over the past years, 3 Summits, 14 BIMSTEC Ministerial Meetings, 16 Senior Officials' Meetings and a number of sectoral Ministerial Meetings have been held to advance the interests of economy-wide and sectoral cooperation among the member countries in light of BIMSTEC's declared objectives. Other Specialized Task force Meetings, Joint Working Group Meetings and Expert Group Meetings have also been held on a regular basis to design concrete actions towards implementation of the agreed agendas and decisions. The challenge will now be to implement the decisions taken at various levels with due urgency and efficacy. The Secretariat will hopefully lead this exercise.

Going Forward

BIMTEC is a grouping that includes a major economic powerhouse of twenty-first century, India; the region that it encompasses is in the neighbourhood of another powerhouse economy, China. BIMSTEC straddles both SAARC and ASEAN. The grouping has five countries that belong to SAARC (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka), and two that are members of ASEAN (Myanmar and Thailand). Whilst BIMSTEC offers the SAARC members an opportunity to look east to the ASEAN market, it also offers an opportunity to the ASEAN members to look west towards the SAARC. There is, thus, a confluence of interests that allows BIMSTEC members to widen and deepen cooperation covering a wide swathe of territory and a vast region with significant wealth of natural resources and a very large and growing market.

BIMSTEC could play an important role both from the perspective of exploiting the opportunities of the Bay of Bengal basin and also in taking advantage of the opportunities that could emerge from leveraging the economic needs of the hinterland that embraces not only BIMSTEC region but also beyond. The continuing negotiations as regards the BIMSTEC-FTA could prove to be important in terms of deepening BIMSTEC integration if countries demonstrate a readiness to be ambitious with respect to both goods and services sector integration. Implementation of BIMSTEC-FTA road map could play an important role in enhancing intra-regional flow of goods, services and investment and promoting regional value chains based on competitive advantages. Steps will need to be taken towards trade facilitation including development of infrastructure at the land customs stations, electronic data exchange, harmonization of sanitary-phytosanitary measures, standards, certification and documentation and standard operating procedures, and establishment of single windows.

From the Bangladesh country perspective, since BIMSTEC provides a gateway to the east, opportunities to deepen cooperation with ASEAN countries, by taking advantage of BIMSTEC, should receive special attention. BIMSTEC cooperation could be leveraged to get into the growing ASEAN market. BIMSTEC cooperation could also leverage initiatives such as the BCIM-Economic corridor. Coordination with initiatives such as BCIM-EC would allow BIMSTEC to take advantage of sub-regional cooperation and connectivity in and around the grouping.

The resolution of issues related to maritime boundary demarcation has now opened up new opportunities for collaboration, to explore and to take advantage of the vast resources of the Bay of Bengal by leveraging the BIMSTEC. The 'Blue Economy' could be the next great frontier for the BIMSTEC. Bangladesh has already shown keen interest in this regard. BIMSTEC members could take up bilateral and multilateral initiatives to harness marine mineral, fish and other resources towards long term energy security, economic growth and sustainable development of the region. Collaborative efforts to explore and develop the maritime resources of Bay of Bengal will not only generate rich dividends but also build trust and ensure rise of BIMSTEC as a region of permanent peace and shared prosperity.

Concluding Remarks

Establishment of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat in Dhaka transmits a shared vision and reflects a collective commitment on the part of BIMSTEC leaders to transform BIMSTEC into a region of peace, prosperity, friendship and partnership. At the same time, it is important to recognise that in a fast-moving and fast-changing dynamic world there is no alternative to fast pacing our collective endeavours to realise this vision. It will be Secretariat which will need to spearhead the efforts to translate the vision of BIMSTEC into reality, a reality from which all member countries and their citizens will stand to gain.

Mindful of the formidable tasks that confront BIMSTEC, one is hopeful that with support from all key stakeholders the newly established Permanent Secretariat of the BIMSTEC will be able to rise up to these challenges.

The writer is the Executive Director of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)



**PRESIDENT
DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA**



Message

It gives me much pleasure to send this message to mark the inauguration of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat in Dhaka.

Conscious that social progress and economic development are best attained in the Bay of Bengal sub-region by the creation of an enabling environment for cooperation, our leaders launched the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in 1997. Although successive gatherings of leaders have striven to enrich and expand the scope of cooperation, implementation of the decisions taken at these meeting remained a major challenge in the past without an institutional body

It is with a sense of pride and satisfaction that this long felt need has become a reality today with the establishment of the BIMSTEC Secretariat. I wish to commend the government of Bangladesh which undertook to host the Permanent Secretariat in Dhaka, providing all the necessary support and facilities.

Sri Lanka is particularly pleased that Ambassador Sumith Nakandala from Sri Lanka has been chosen by consensus to be the first Secretary General of the BIMSTEC. This is testimony to our shared commitment to work together in a spirit of mutual respect and goodwill to drive forward this unique sub-regional body.

BIMSTEC has come a long way since its inception. We have been able to broad base our regional reach with a view to harnessing our diverse potential for the greater benefit of our region. We are pleased to acknowledge that BIMSTEC has made significant strides, and evolved to be a key mechanism in fostering cooperation among nations in the Bay of Bengal.

With the establishment of the Permanent Secretariat, I am confident that there will be a greater focus on effective implementation of decisions of our leaders which would eventually lead to the realization of the noble goals of BIMSTEC.

Mahinda Rajapaksa

**FOREIGN MINISTER
GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH**



Message

On behalf of the people and the Government of Bangladesh, I have the pleasure to extend our warmest greetings and felicitations to the people of the BIMSTEC Member States on this auspicious occasion of the formal inauguration of the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) Secretariat in Dhaka.

BIMSTEC is a natural link between South Asia and South-East Asia, which was established on 6 June 1997 to capitalize on the advantages of economic potentials of the region. While the member states are bound by common history and culture they also face many common challenges. BIMSTEC was born out of the desire by the Member States to face these challenges through collective action for mutual benefit of the people of the region. Member States have felt the necessity of a BIMSTEC Secretariat since long for effective coordination and follow-up of BIMSTEC activities. Now that the Secretariat is established in Dhaka, it would be a significant step forward towards realizing its goals and harnessing the potentials of the region. Apart from playing its due role in implementing BIMSTEC's programmes and projects, I believe, the Secretariat will be able to bring innovative ideas and initiatives for cooperation in the identified priority areas. The successful operationalization of the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka is a momentous diplomatic achievement for the present Government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks and deep appreciation to the Governments and the people of the Member States for choosing Dhaka as the venue for the BIMSTEC Secretariat. I take this opportunity to congratulate H. E. Mr. Sumith Nakandala as the first Secretary General of BIMSTEC. I believe that he will be able to steer the organization in the right direction in the coming days for the betterment of the people of the region.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our Government's continued support and commitment to the BIMSTEC Secretariat. I strongly believe that the activities of BIMSTEC would help Bangladesh to translate the dreams of 'Sonar Bangla' (Golden Bangla) as envisioned by the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman into a reality.

Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh live forever.

Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, MP

**SECRETARY GENERAL
BIMSTEC**



Message

The ceremonial inauguration of the BIMSTEC Secretariat by the Honourable Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh undoubtedly marks a very significant milestone in our regional group. Founded in 1997 in Bangkok, the BIMSTEC is now entering into a new paradigm in the process of regional cooperation and integration. The BIMSTEC represents the aspiration of around 1.5 billion people across the Bay of Bengal littoral and adjacent areas, which accounts for 21 % of global population. It has 14 specific and area-based cooperation and the organization is now more matured and is poised to pave the solid foundation for pragmatic and sustainable cooperation among the Member States. One of the remarkable features of BIMSTEC is that it is a unique bridge between South Asia and South East Asia. Both the regions are emerging as undisputed vibrant growth centres in the world in the 21st Century. The BIMSTEC has a combined Gross Domestic Product of around US \$ 2.5 trillion economy and it has the potential of creating trade worth of US \$ 43 to 59 billion under the proposed BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement. The new Permanent Secretariat will act as a catalyst in implementing programs and initiatives by way of effective facilitation and smooth coordination.

The Secretariat reiterates its unflinching commitment to pursue the goals and visions of the Member States as envisioned in the Bangkok Declaration of 1997 and expresses its deep gratitude to the Member States, especially to the host Government of Bangladesh for its cooperation and assistance provided.

The Secretariat also looks forward to further cooperation and working closely with the Member States to realise the deeper integration and for a larger Asian Community.

Sumith Nakandala