

**Statement by Hon. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka**  
**at the 2<sup>nd</sup> BIMSTEC Summit**  
**13 November 2008, New Delhi**

Your Excellency, Dr. Manmohan Singh,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,

On this landmark occasion of the Second BIMSTEC Summit in New Delhi, I express my deep appreciation to His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India and the Government of India for the warm and gracious hospitality extended to me and my delegation and for the excellent Summit arrangements. I felicitate His Excellency the Prime Minister of India on his unanimous election as Chairperson of BIMSTEC.

May I also take this opportunity to congratulate Your Excellency Dr Manmohan Singh, the Government and the people of India on your great achievement of launching the "Chandrayaan". We, as South Asians take pride in this achievement.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the continuous and remarkable contribution made by the Government of Thailand, and for having played the role of sheet anchoring the absence of a permanent secretariat during all these years.

This is the first BIMSTEC Summit that I am attending as the President of Sri Lanka. I wish to reiterate my commitment to furthering the objectives of the Grouping. I propose that we meet bi-annually as originally envisaged.

Our Summit is taking place at a time when an international financial crisis, originating in Western capital markets, is sweeping across the world. While the BIMSTEC nations have constructively and prudently engaged in the process of globalization, nevertheless the economic challenges faced by many of our major trading partners, will inevitably have some impact on our own pace of growth.

The situation has therefore made all of us very much aware of the protection that regional self-reliance can afford, against global economic uncertainties. Our host India, with its vast capacity and economic potential can indeed serve as an engine, driving and guiding us to withstand the fallout of the global crisis while ushering prosperity for our region.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,  
Poverty is an issue for not just some countries of our Group, but for a significant part of the world population. The recently concluded Ministerial Meeting on Cooperation in Poverty Alleviation, manifests the importance that BIMSTEC attaches to this subject. In addition, the fisheries and agriculture sectors which have great potential for poverty alleviation merit the strongest possible focus by BIMSTEC.

The alleviation of poverty forms one of the core objectives of my government. After three years of active implementation, a majority of the proposals contained in the 'Mahinda Chintana' which is my election manifesto, have delivered many benefits to my people. A number of poverty alleviation programmes, both direct and indirect, indeed have proved to be success stories, and have empowered the rural people. Sri Lanka will continue to share her experiences in this field with the other Member States, while contributing whole-heartedly to the collective effort against poverty.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,  
Achieving energy security has come to the forefront of the global agenda and has posed a tremendous challenge, particularly to developing countries. Oil prices have increased significantly since 2002, although there has been a decline in the prices in recent weeks.

Our efforts at developing alternate forms of energy such as solar, wind and bio-fuels for domestic consumption and for use by industry must remain paramount. However, we do not support the use of arable land to produce bio fuels to drive cars.

As the lead country for BIMSTEC cooperation in Technology, Sri Lanka urges that the highest priority should be assigned to the BIMSTEC initiatives for the establishment of the Energy Centre and the Trans Power Exchange and Development Project.

The promotion of trade among us is an important means for regional development and growth. The operationalization of the BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement, has despite our best efforts been delayed. Nevertheless, we are all looking forward to the timely finalization of an Agreement that provides for all Members equitable benefits. We are pleased that Sri Lanka had been unanimously elected to continue as the Chair of the Trade Negotiating Committee.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,  
It is in our collective interest to pursue initiatives to promote inter and intra-regional tourism. The move to establish a Tourism Information Centre and very importantly, a Tourism Fund is commendable. We should also seriously consider the joint marketing of the BIMSTEC region as one destination.

In this regard, I am pleased to announce that Sri Lanka looks forward to contributing to regional familiarization tour programmes, conducted with the collaboration of fellow Member States. Furthermore, the Sri Lanka Hotel School is ready to extend opportunities for nationals of member states to follow its internationally acclaimed training programmes.

The establishment of the Cultural Industries Observatory in Bhutan is a significant development. I am confident that such measures will contribute immensely to the development of the tourism industry in the region including in pilgrimage tourism.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,  
Sri Lanka wholeheartedly supports the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking as an important and vital milestone in our efforts on counter terrorism.

Terrorist groups are able to sustain themselves by illegal fundraising, narcotics and people trafficking, money laundering using international networks, and arms and ammunition smuggling including through the sea routes in the Bay of Bengal. I urge you to consider setting up a mechanism to effectively police the seas of the Bay of Bengal, to deny these terrorists mobility and connectivity.

For over two decades, Sri Lanka has been facing a tremendous challenge to our democratic way of life through the barbaric actions of a terrorist group, the LTTE. There is no doubt that such groups have to be dealt with militarily. At the same time Sri Lanka believes that any underlying causes, exploited by the terrorists in an attempt to seek legitimacy for their operations, should be dealt with politically. I wish to assure this august gathering that we are firmly on the path to apolitical solution.

We welcome the consensus on establishing a Secretariat. This will give the necessary institutional strength. Sri Lanka is ready, in a spirit of commitment to the success of the BIMSTEC process, to host the Secretariat in Colombo.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

By founding this grouping, we have united in a community of littoral and hinterland states of the Bay of Bengal. Through our efforts in BIMSTEC, we must resolutely ensure that our peoples would be the beneficiaries of a number of freedoms, including most importantly, freedom from the fear of terrorism and freedom from hunger and poverty. We owe them no less.

May the blessings of the Noble Triple Gem be with you.

Thank you.

13 November 2008