

*as delivered on 03 March 2014*

## **FOURTEEN BIMSTEC MINISTERIAL MEETING**

03 March 2014

*Nay Pyi Taw, MYANMAR*

### **Statement by H.E. Lyonpo Rinzin Dorje, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan**

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Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentleman,

Allow me to express our sincere appreciation to the Government and people of Myanmar for the excellent arrangements and the warm hospitality extended to us since our arrival. We are indeed happy to be here in the beautiful city of Nay Pyi Taw which I believe translates to the "Abode of Kings."

May I extend my felicitations to H.E. U Wunna Maung Lwin on his assumption as the Chair of the 14th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting. I am confident that under your able stewardship we will not only be able to review the progress that has been made since the last ministerial meeting, but also identify the gaps and challenges that our region continues to face and give further guidance in our collective effort towards enhancing the socio-economic well being of our people. Towards this end, I assure Your Excellency of our fullest support and cooperation.

Our appreciation also goes to the Government of Myanmar for having tirelessly maintained the momentum of our organization since the last Summit, and the Government of Thailand for hosting the monthly meetings of the BIMSTEC Working Group.

Mr. Chairman,

The absence of an institutional mechanism to follow-up on decisions taken and in coordinating the various programme activities under the agreed areas of cooperation has hampered progress of our organization. We, therefore, welcome the signing of the *Memorandum of Association of the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat* at the Summit tomorrow, which we hope will add further impetus in revitalizing our cooperation and moving our common agenda forward.

We welcome the nomination of H.E. Ambassador Sumith Nakandala as the first Secretary General of BIMSTEC. As he assumes his new post and faces the daunting challenge of setting up the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat, Ambassador Nakandala can be assured of our fullest cooperation.

Mr. Chairman,

Economic cooperation lies at the heart of any cooperation and we are all aware that trade, investment, services and tourism are the engines of national as well as regional growth. But economic links between BIMSTEC countries are still relatively under-developed. We believe that enhanced regional trade will bring about tremendous benefits for our peoples. BIMSTEC can act as the synergizer that enables our countries to leverage on each other's potential for mutual economic benefits. It is, therefore, but imperative that modalities to implement a Free Trade Agreement for establishing an appropriate trade regime, which was signed in 2004, be completed at the earliest.

In order to facilitate tourism, trade and investment, the development of key infrastructure such as transportation and communication linkages are necessary. Trade expansion measures will have little impact in the absence of the requisite infrastructure to support this process. The BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistic Study (BTILS) undertaken through technical assistance of the ADB in 2007, had proposed broad policy Framework and Strategies to promote interregional integration through trade and improved connectivity, particularly in transport communication linkages. While the BTILS holds enormous promises and

potentials for our economies, progress on this initiative is far from satisfactory. With the updating of the BTILS having now been undertaken by ADB, we hope that momentum will not be lost.

Similarly, we must also strengthen our collaboration in the field of agriculture as the livelihoods of the majority of our people are dependent on it. Cooperation in this sector through sharing of information and expertise will augment our efforts to enhance rural income and alleviate poverty.

The complex and multi-dimensional nature of poverty defies quick and easy solutions. Poverty reduction, particularly rural poverty through employment generation, enhancement of productivity, increase in real wage, higher investment in agriculture and rural development are some of the challenges that we confront. At the same time, urban poverty, which is recognized as a different phenomenon, merits its own strategic response. In this regard, we welcome the Poverty Plan Of Action endorsed at the Second BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Poverty in 2012 towards intensifying our collective efforts in poverty reduction.

We look forward to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory and the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission, which underlines new opportunities of culture in development through cultural industries by blending traditional culture and modern innovative technology. The MoU is significant due to its twin impact on community vitalization and poverty reduction. This is also expected to deepen the knowledge and appreciation of each other's cultures, cultural heritage and cultural property between our peoples.

Mr. Chairman,

Cooperation in Environment and Disaster Management is another area, which could impact meaningfully on our people as human life is fundamentally dependent on natural systems and resources. There cannot be sustainable development without environmental sustainability. As we work to fight poverty, promote socio-economic development and improve the living standards of our people, growing pressures on our environment and resources could undermine the

prosperity we hope to deliver. Therefore, it is essential that we take into account the integrity of the environment in any of our programmes, projects or activities aimed at development and encourage green growth policies.

As a region prone to many natural disasters, we must continue to intensify and strengthen cooperation in this area. Every year we witness the ravaging effects of natural disasters triggered by earthquakes, cyclones and torrential rains all over our region unleashing death and destruction of biblical proportion and affecting millions of lives. The signing of the Memorandum of Association on the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Weather and Climate Centre is, therefore, timely as this is expected to facilitate greater cooperation in disaster reduction and management.

The menace of transnational crime and terrorism is a serious threat to all our countries. Acts of terror in whatever form or manifestation resulting in the loss of innocent lives cannot be justified on any grounds and only reinforces the imperatives of collaborating with each other more closely on this issue. It is about preserving our common values such as democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

One of the greatest challenges many of our countries face is to safeguard the health of our population, particularly the poor, young, vulnerable and the marginalized against the scourge of new and re-emerging diseases. We need to enhance our preparedness to address health emergencies, including prevention and control of pandemics that pose a major threat, impacting on health, trade and tourism.

The availability of energy is also vital to achieve sustained socio-economic development. Indeed, the ever increasing demand for and rising prices of energy is a matter of great concern for all of us. We must continue to cooperate with each other to make optimal use of energy resources available in the region, to identify alternative sources of energy, and to develop and promote the use of renewable energy.

At the same time in a world permeated by technology, we cannot afford to lag behind if we are to accelerate the pace of development and enhance our

competitiveness. Technology empowers those who own it and understand it and puts those who don't at a disadvantage. Cooperation in this area is vital for us to build our capacity and to bridge the technological divide.

Mr. Chairman,

I feel I need not elaborate on a number of other issues that are significant to the advancement of the regional integration process. The changing dynamics of the international system makes regional cooperation imperative. Today, without the cover of regional integration and cooperation, most countries would be unable to individually withstand the onslaught of globalization and related social and economic perils. Having a common approach to global issues can yield positive results for the region as matters such as trade, climate change and the reform of the global economic systems have a direct impact on the region.

In conclusion, I am convinced that solutions to our challenges are achievable if we believe unwaveringly in our integration movement, if we are prepared to use all the skills and tools at our disposal to build a strong, viable, prosperous BIMSTEC Community and if we put on the armour of regionalism to combat our national shortcomings. As someone once said, "in a changing world we must respond to redefine our place for we cannot remain still and expect the world to embrace us."

Thank you and Tashi Delek.