

Statement by
Hon. Mr. Mahendra Bahadur Pandey, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal,
at the Fourteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting
Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar
03 March 2014

Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to attend the 14th Ministerial Meeting of BIMSTEC being held in this beautiful capital city of Nay Pyi Taw.

At the outset, allow me to extend sincere thanks to Your Excellency, U Wunna Maung Lwin, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and through you to the Government and the people of the Union of the Republic of Myanmar, for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to us and for the excellent arrangements made for our meeting. My delegation is confident that under your able leadership, Mr. Chairman, our meeting will come to fruitful conclusions. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation in discharging important responsibility entrusted to you.

Mr. Chairman,

As global economic power gradually shifts to Asia, our region receives increased attention in the evolving global economic landscape as a region with tremendous

potential for economic growth and development. This is particularly so because this region is situated in such an advantageous position that it connects vibrant economic growth poles of Asia- South East Asia and South Asia.

I am happy to note that cooperation under BIMSTEC has registered some progress in some of the areas, including trade, tourism and institution building. Important institutions of BIMSTEC relating to weather and climate, culture, and the Secretariat are going to be established after we complete necessary formalities during this summit meeting. We are pleased that BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat would commence its functions soon with the appointment of His Excellency Mr Sumith Nakandala as its first Secretary General. This is an encouraging development that we welcome. We believe that the Permanent Secretariat as well as the other institutions would contribute towards realizing the aims of BIMSTEC in respective areas for the larger interest of all Member States.

It is Nepal's firm belief that cooperation under this regional framework provides an excellent platform for us to share knowledge and experience, harness the tremendous potentials of our region for development, and to collectively address numerous challenges we confront by engaging in meaningful cooperation and collaboration. Nepal is of the view that the support to the least-developed members, which face structural constraints and handicaps in their development endeavours, will further strengthen our regional spirit of togetherness and solidarity.

While we remain fully committed to fostering regional cooperation in line with our foreign policy objectives, I would like to inform this august gathering that we, in Nepal, are currently engaged in the historic task of writing a new constitution through the Constituent Assembly to institutionalize democratic gains achieved over the years

through successive people's movements. The present Government, formed after the November 2013 elections to the second Constituent Assembly, will make all efforts possible to ensure that the new constitution is drafted and promulgated within a year as per the wish of the people of Nepal. I hope Nepal will continue receiving support from our friendly neighbours and other countries in pursuit of a peaceful, stable, democratic and prosperous Nepal.

Mr Chairman,

In order to make the process of regional cooperation more dynamic and result-oriented, we need to put in place a right mix of policies, legal framework, institutions, and resources, both human and material. Our cooperation should focus on prioritizing activities that have the potential to deliver tangible results that make a difference in the living standard of our peoples.

Trade is an engine of economic growth. The signing of the Framework Agreement on the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area, including its Protocol, is a milestone in the BIMSTEC process. This should pave the way for boosting our intra-regional trade. For this, we need to expedite negotiations for conclusion of agreements on trade in goods, trade in services, mutual assistance in customs matters, among others. Focus on investment is equally essential to enhance productive capacity of Member States to accelerate the process of economic growth and development. We believe that benefits of regional economic integration should contribute to the development and prosperity of each and every member of the grouping taking into account in particular the special needs and difficulties of the poorest and the most vulnerable among them.

Despite our best efforts, poverty still remains a formidable challenge in our region with a large chunk of people living below poverty line. Alleviation of poverty by launching

projects and programmes directly benefitting the region's poor should, therefore, be on high priority in our cooperation framework. Nepal, as the lead country in BIMSTEC on Poverty Alleviation, has been making all possible efforts to bring tangible progress in this sector. Timely and effective implementation of the Poverty Plan of Action (PPA) adopted by the Second BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation held in Kathmandu in 2012 will be critical for this endeavour.

Mr Chairman,

Regional connectivity through air, land and sea as well as effective means of communication is quintessential for the greater flow of goods, services and the peoples across the region. In this context, the draft Phase I Report of the BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study (BTILS) done by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is an important step towards facilitating the development of infrastructure network in the region.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy for many of us. We still depend on traditional way of farming with little impact on economic growth. Without proper development of this sector, it would be difficult for us to eradicate poverty and attain prosperity. Therefore, there is a need of active cooperation and collaboration for the development of this sector, including through the application of latest technology and modern methods of farming.

Our region is sitting on wealth of resources of one sort or the other. Our resource endowments, both human and natural, covering water, natural gas, oil, forest products, and minerals, etc. can, if tapped fully, transform economic landscape of our region, making it one of the prosperous regions in the world.

Energy is considered as the lifeblood of economy. The twenty-first century is likely to witness fierce competition over energy security as nations aspire to grow and develop rapidly. Despite enormous potential, our region is deficient in energy supply. To overcome this, we need to mobilize more investment in the production, distribution and utilization of energy and the development and exchange of cleaner technologies. I hope the Third BIMSTEC Energy Ministers' Meeting to be held in Nepal later this year will deliberate on all vital aspects of energy cooperation.

Mr Chairman,

Our region has equally huge potential for the development of tourism sector, given its natural beauty and rich cultural, religious and historical sites. We are of the view that development of Buddhist circuit is one such area where meaningful cooperation is possible in view of the fact that all member countries are associated with this in one way or the other. We have to further strengthen people-to-people contacts through exchange of visits, interactions, sharing of experiences and ideas, and other forms of contacts.

In an interconnected, interdependent and globalizing world, it is not only the opportunities that lie ahead but also an array of new problems and challenges. Our region has been facing a serious threat of terrorism. Nepal condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. To deal with this menace and to address other challenges such as organized crimes, human and drug trafficking, concerted, collaborative and coordinated efforts will be required at all levels-bilateral, regional and global.

Likewise, strong regional partnership under the framework of BIMSTEC will be required to deal with the growing phenomena of climate change, environmental degradation, natural disasters, food insecurity, HIV/AIDS and pandemic diseases, among others.

In conclusion, **Mr. Chairman**, let us work together to fully realize the aims of BIMSTEC with a view to enabling our peoples to enjoy the fruits of development and prosperity. Our peoples deserve decent and dignified life. Nepal, on its part, stands ready to join hands with fellow Member States towards this end. As we prepare ourselves for assuming the chairmanship of BIMSTEC, we will work in close collaboration with all the fellow Member States in furthering cooperation for our common benefits.

Thank you!