

Statement
at the 14th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting
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on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand

Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar
3 March 2014

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to be here and to represent my Foreign Minister at this important Meeting. Today's Meeting and the Summit tomorrow will certainly set the future direction of BIMSTEC.

And our deepest appreciation to the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar for the excellent arrangements and warm hospitality extended to us, especially the lovely dinner last night.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

Since its establishment in 1997, BIMSTEC has made steady progress in all areas of our cooperation. Thailand is very pleased to have worked closely with all our partners in advancing our partnership within BIMSTEC.

Tomorrow's **Summit** gives us the chance to **look ahead, reinvigorate** our **partnership**, and identify areas where we need to concentrate our efforts. Most importantly, we need to make BIMSTEC truly **people-centred** and bring equitable, inclusive, sustainable development to our peoples.

The **first area** where we should intensify our efforts is **transport and communication**, in particular **connectivity**. Indeed, enhancing BIMSTEC connectivity will not only facilitate freer flows of goods, services, and people, but

will also help our goods and services reach markets faster, in larger volumes, and at lower cost.

The ADB has contributed much to BIMSTEC's work on connectivity. The BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study, or B-T-I-L-S, will help to set the direction for our efforts.

We hope that the ADB can play a bigger role in support of connectivity within BIMSTEC, given the extensive work it is already doing in the region.

Looking ahead, what we need to do is to develop a master plan for connectivity that addresses missing links and bottlenecks.

For our part, Thailand is working on extending the East-West Economic Corridor in the Mekong sub-region to the BIMSTEC region through the **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project**.

We are also working on the **Dawei Deep Sea Port and Industrial Development Zone Project** which, once realised, will be a strategic maritime link connecting the eastern and western fronts of BIMSTEC via the Chennai Port of India.

Connectivity, as we all know, also has its **downsides**. **Terrorism, transnational crime, drug and human trafficking** are just some of the associated risks that we need to manage. Thailand welcomes the Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking. And on our part, we will proceed with ratification as soon as possible.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The **second area** where we must do more is **trade and investment**, especially concluding a **BIMSTEC FTA** for trade in goods as soon as possible and then beginning work on an agreement for services and investment.

With regard to the FTA negotiations, we would need to move at a pace comfortable to all, but we need to expedite our efforts. We need to move forward towards the conclusion of the agreement as soon as possible.

The **third area** we should focus on is **energy security**, given the growing demand for energy in our rapidly developing region. Therefore, we have to continue to find ways and means of increasing energy efficiency as well as promoting clean and renewable energy, and overall energy security.

Also, **climate change** is very much a reality that confronts all of us. And because we are a disaster-prone region, we must step up cooperation in disaster response and management.

But looking ahead, BIMSTEC must give greater priority to the area of **human security**. BIMSTEC should do more to address issues that have a direct impact on the daily lives of our peoples – issues such as **poverty eradication, education, food security, and healthcare**.

In terms of **food security**, Thailand stands ready to work with other BIMSTEC Member States through exchanges of best agricultural practices. We are also open to exploring the possibility of a BIMSTEC emergency rice reserve scheme, perhaps along the lines of the ASEAN + 3 framework.

As regards **healthcare**, the challenge is how to make it accessible and affordable for all. In this respect, Thailand has experience to share on our Universal Health Care scheme.

Addressing these issues is vital to a people-centred BIMSTEC, bringing the benefits of BIMSTEC cooperation to our peoples.

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,**

Our future progress also depends very much on strengthening our institutions and mechanisms.

We, therefore, welcome the establishment of the **BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat**. It will help us ensure continuity of work and provide the needed impetus for our cooperation.

We congratulate Bangladesh for being the host of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat. Our congratulations also go to His Excellency Mr. Sumith Nakandala (สุมิฐ นาคันดาล่า) for being designated the first Secretary-General of BIMSTEC.

Thailand is also pleased with progress the establishment of various BIMSTEC regional centres, such as the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate, the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory, and the BIMSTEC Energy Centre.

But ultimately, we need to sustain the needed political will. Therefore, Thailand attaches importance to the holding of a Ministerial Meeting every year.

**Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Asia is on the rise. Asia has emerged as the engine of global economic growth. The Asian Century has arrived. I am sure that with the strength of our collective efforts and strong political will, we can put BIMSTEC at the forefront of Asia's rise.

On this note, I wish to commend Myanmar for her tireless efforts as Chair in steering BIMSTEC cooperation since 2009.

Our congratulations also go to Nepal, as next BIMSTEC Chair.

I assure you that Thailand reaffirms her commitment to the BIMSTEC process and will work closely with Nepal and the BIMSTEC Secretariat – as well as all future Chairs – to realise the objectives of BIMSTEC's founding fathers for the benefit of our region and our peoples.

Thank you.