

**Remarks by  
H.E. Mr. Tenzin Lekphell  
Secretary-General of BIMSTEC**

**Conference on Improving Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and  
Response (PPR) through One Health Approach**

**Colombo, Sri Lanka, 24 July 2023**

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- His Excellency Keheliya Rambukwella, Minister of Health of Sri Lanka,
- Mr. Sagala Ratnayake, Senior Advisor on National Security and Chief of Presidential Staff,
- Mr. Anura Dissanayake, Secretary to the Prime Minister,
- Mr. Janaka Chandraguptha, Secretary to the Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka,
- All other Secretaries representing different Ministries of the Government of Sri Lanka,
- Mr. Chiyo Kanda, Country Manager, Sri Lanka, of the World Bank,
- Dr. Asela Gunawardena, Director General of Health Services of the Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka, and other Senior Officials of the Government of Sri Lanka,
- High Commissioners, Ambassadors, and representatives from the Development Partners,
- Excellencies,
- Distinguished Delegates from BIMSTEC Member States and beyond,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to be here with you this morning, representing BIMSTEC, at this important Conference co-hosted by the World Bank and the Government of Sri Lanka. As a Bhutanese national from the land-locked Kingdom of the high-altitude mountainous Himalayas, it is always a pleasure for me, personally, to visit the beautiful Indian Ocean nation of Sri Lanka, which is the only Island nation in BIMSTEC. Colombo is the only capital City of our Organisation that is right by the Ocean. And visiting Colombo is always something that gives me immense pleasure, and something that I always look forward to.

**Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In 2021, following a process of rationalisation and reorganisation of the BIMSTEC sectors of cooperation, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of BIMSTEC decided to establish Health as a new sub-sector of cooperation. They also decided to establish an BIMSTEC Expert Group on Public Health to develop a Plan of Action on Public Health, and designated Sri Lanka as the Lead Member State for BIMSTEC Cooperation in Health. These decisions were approved by the Heads of State and Government of BIMSTEC during the Fifth BIMSTEC Summit held in Colombo, virtually, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March last year.

I congratulate the Honourable Minister of Health of Sri Lanka, and the Government of Sri Lanka, for acting so quickly after the 5<sup>th</sup> Summit last year to convene this First Meeting of the Expert Group on Public Health, in-person, in Colombo, before the next BIMSTEC Summit scheduled for November this year. This is a remarkable achievement, and a remarkable demonstration of commitment to strengthen cooperation on public health in the region.

Since BIMSTEC Ministerial Meetings and Summits have focused particular attention in recent meetings on improving Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response, the Government of Sri Lanka has teamed up with the World Bank that is doing significant work in this area, globally, to host this Conference, back-to-back with the Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Public Health.

This Conference brings together experts, administrators, and officials from a range of countries including BIMSTEC Member States and beyond, and from international and other regional organisations, for two-days, to discuss issues related to Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response through One-Health Approach.

I thank and congratulate the World Bank for coming forward so readily and swiftly to partner with the Government of Sri Lanka and BIMSTEC to organise this Conference, and to support regional efforts that are being initiated under the BIMSTEC umbrella on pandemic PPR. These are matters that directly impact on the lives of people in our region. Your efforts, therefore, are deeply appreciated.

As we all know, “One Health” which is a collaborative, multisectoral, and transdisciplinary approach – working at the local, regional, national, and global levels – with the goal of achieving optimal health outcomes, recognising the interconnection between people, animals, plants and their shared environment, is not something new.

But it is acknowledged and recognised, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that brought the world to a standstill, and wreaked havoc on our economies, that the One Health Approach is of critical importance, especially with the multitude of changes that the world is experiencing.

I am confident that this two-day Conference will be a rewarding experience for all the participants.

I conclude my remarks by thanking the Government of Sri Lanka, the World Bank, and everyone who has worked tirelessly to bring us all here to Colombo to make this Conference and the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Public Health, a reality.

I look forward to listening to the experts.

Thank you very much.

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