

**Remarks by
H.E. Tenzin Lekphell, Secretary General of BIMSTEC
at the 6th Indian Ocean Conference
Dhaka, 13 May 2023**

Peace, Prosperity, and Partnership for a Resilient Future

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been an absolute pleasure to listen to all the distinguished speakers and panellists who spoke before me, and I look forward to listening to those who will be taking the floor after me. These two days have been an enriching & enlightening experience for me; and it is an honour to participate in this Conference.

I want to thank the Government of Bangladesh, the Ministry of External Affairs of India, the India Foundation, and the Rajaratnam School of International Studies of Singapore -for organising this Conference. You have brought together - a wide array of important stakeholders from a range of countries and organisations - to deliberate on a theme that is of critical importance not just to us in the Indian Ocean region, but to the entire world.

Excellencies,

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation – BIMSTEC – consists of countries around the Bay of Bengal, which is an integral part of the Indian Ocean. Five of our Member States are from South Asia: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka; and two are from Southeast Asia: Myanmar, and Thailand. BIMSTEC is therefore often perceived as an organisation that forms a bridge between South and Southeast Asia.

Formed in 1997, BIMSTEC has gained new vigour with the adoption of its **Charter** last year - during the 5th BIMSTEC Summit held in Colombo.

The Charter which confers legal personality on BIMSTEC - **identifies among its purposes** – the **maintenance of peace and stability in the Bay of Bengal region** - through close collaboration in combating international terrorism, transnational organized crime - as well as natural disasters, climate change, and communicable diseases.

The **Charter**, among others, also lists as BIMSTEC's purposes:

- The maintenance of close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes;
- Creating an enabling environment for rapid economic development;
- Accelerating economic growth and social progress;
- Providing assistance to each other; and
- Cooperating more effectively in joint efforts that are supportive of - and complementary to national development plans of the Member States - which result in tangible benefits to the people in raising their living standards.

All this, relates directly to the theme of this Indian Ocean Conference - “Peace, Prosperity, and Partnership for a Resilient Future”.

To ensure that the Indian Ocean Region is peaceful, prosperous, and resilient, the countries in the region need to strengthen existing partnerships between themselves; with Indian Ocean Users; as well as others - both Organisations and States.

BIMSTEC in this connection, Excellencies, **can serve as an important and central tool** for its Member States and like-minded partners - to work towards maintaining peace and achieving prosperity for a resilient Indian Ocean Region.

Making use of the BIMSTEC Charter provisions, that enable BIMSTEC to cooperate with international and regional organisations; admit States, regional organisations & international organisations as Observers; and also admit new Members – are important aspects in this regard.

Distinguished Delegates

The Bay of Bengal region that makes up BIMSTEC is a home to about 1.8 billion people. This is a substantial percentage of the population of the Indian Ocean Region which is considered to be around 2.7 billion. The combined GDP of the BIMSTEC countries is considered to be over 3.6 trillion US dollars.

Considering the geographic location of the Member States that make up the Organisation, BIMSTEC can be considered **central as an Indian Ocean Hub** - in both security and economic terms; and for achieving sustainable development - consistent with the BIMSTEC Charter.

Evolving BIMSTEC to play such a central role requires commitment, creativity, innovation, sustained political will, openness, and vision among the BIMSTEC Member States. It also requires consistent hard work to forge ties - with like-minded partner nations and organisations - across the Indian Ocean Region & beyond.

Deliberations at this important two-day Conference, I believe, could in fact draw attention to this aspect, and ignite the minds of State representatives as well as other stakeholders - as to **how BIMSTEC could be mobilised and evolved to play a central role in securing sustained peace & prosperity in the Indian Ocean Region.**

Excellencies,

I believe that all of us at this Conference - representing different Member States and Organisations are here - because of our commitment to a **shared vision of an Indian Ocean - built on peace, security, stability & prosperity.** As a state-led and government-driven Organisation, the BIMSTEC Member States - set the Agenda for BIMSTEC. And I hope that the BIMSTEC Member States will ensure that BIMSTEC evolves and grows in a manner in which it can play a central role in achieving this shared vision.

Thank you.