

Remarks by the Secretary General of BIMSTEC
4th Meeting of the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group
20 March 2023, Bangkok, Thailand [Virtual]

H.E. Mr. Chakree Bamrungwong, Principal Advisor on Land Transport Economics, Ministry of Transport, Government of the Kingdom of Thailand,

Distinguished Delegates,

Good Morning,

First of all, I am delighted that the 4th Meeting of the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group (BTCWG) is finally taking place today. I have always looked forward for this meeting since there are some critical issues in this sector that requires immediate attention of this Working Group. Besides, we all know that we haven't had this BIMSTEC Transport Working Group meeting for the last 2 and half years.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Transport of the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand, for finally being able to bring the delegates of this Working Group together and hosting the 4th BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group meeting. Let me also welcome and extend my appreciation to all the delegates from the seven Member States for your cooperation and participation in today's important meeting.

Distinguished Delegates,

Connectivity, as we are all aware, is the cornerstone of BIMSTEC economic cooperation and integration. All our other sectors of cooperation such as Trade & Investment, Agriculture, People to People, Health, Energy and other sectors growth and progress eventually depend on how well connected BIMSTEC is. Therefore, the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group which is the core working body of the Connectivity Sector has an enormous task and a vital role to play in taking forward BIMSTEC as a vibrant regional organization. Hence, the meeting today is very important. It has some critical items that need to be discussed and determined.

First and foremost is the Implementation of the BIMSTEC Connectivity Master Plan. This BIMSTEC Master Plan for Connectivity that took three long years to prepare - and which was adopted during the 5th BIMSTEC summit in March 2022 has not yet had a single meeting and the master plan still remains as a Plan Document only.

Realizing this, the 19th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting which took place very recently on 09th of March 2023, in its joint statement, instructed this Working Group to expedite implementing the Master Plan. The Secretariat in this regard would also like to reiterate to the meeting today to consider this a priority.

Secondly, I would like to inform that the BIMSTEC Leaders during their Fifth Summit directed the member states to develop a Plan of Action of all the seven sectors & sub sectors of BIMSTEC cooperation. The BIMSTEC Transport and Connectivity Working Group therefore also have the task and mandate to prepare the BIMSTEC Connectivity Plan of Action.

The Secretariat is aware that Thailand (as the Lead Country in this sector) has taken the initiative to develop the first draft Plan of Action of BIMSTEC Connectivity and accordingly the draft has been circulated to all the member states. With this draft plan in place, I am sure today's Meeting will have a fruitful deliberation and hopefully be able to finalize the BIMSTEC Connectivity Plan of Action.

Third, we have two pending items that were conceptualized and agreed by the first and second BIMSTEC Working Group meetings but however have not made adequate progress. The **Concept**

Note for BIMSTEC Framework Agreement on Transit, Transshipment and Movement of Vehicular Traffic between and among BIMSTEC Member Countries drafted by Myanmar - has been shared with all member States back in 2019.

The Concept however, now needs to be finalized so that the Framework Agreement drafting can commence which otherwise have been left pending for the last four years. The **BIMSTEC Motor Vehicles Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger, Personal and Cargo Vehicular Traffic between and among the BIMSTEC Member States** is another pending item that was drafted five years ago in 2018.

Once again, the Secretariat would like to recall the concerns of the 19th Ministerial Meeting, and their joint statement directing the relevant Working Groups to expedite finalizing these documents as early possible.

Distinguished Delegates,

In light of above concerns and directives of our leaders, I would like to reiterate to the 4th BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group meeting today;

- to consider the urgency and importance of implementing the Master Plan,
- to finalize the BIMSTEC Connectivity Plan of Action,
- to take note of the pending agreements and direct the relevant Working Groups to expedite in finalizing them

With this, let me conclude by thanking Thailand once again, for hosting this important 4th BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group Meeting; and I wish you all a fruitful deliberation.

Thank you.