

**Special Remarks by H.E. Tenzin Lekphell, Secretary General of BIMSTEC
at the Sixth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee
in Bangkok, Thailand**

Excellencies,
Heads of Delegations,
Distinguished Delegates & my Colleagues from the Secretariat

Good Morning!

First of all, I and my colleagues at the Secretariat are very delighted to be here in Bangkok once more. Most of us were here just a few months back during the 5th BPWC Meeting held in September 2022, during which we had fruitful discussions and indeed made a lot of progress in taking forward the BIMSTEC process.

I also still remember the river cruise on the last day of the meeting that provided a very good informal setting to interact more freely, connect ourselves better and create a conducive working environment. In this regard, I would like to sincerely thank Director General, Cherdchai and his entire team, who are very energetic & cooperative for organizing a very successful 5th BPWC Meeting.

Let me also thank the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand for arranging the 6th BPWC Meeting in person, bringing us all together once more, and we look forward to another successful discussion. On this same note, let me also thank all other Heads of Delegations and their delegates for your full support and cooperation.

Rules of Procedure

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished delegates, The 5th BPWC meeting which was held after a gap of almost 2 years discussed many pending issues and took a number of key decisions. The main focus of the meeting was on the importance of institution building of BIMSTEC. As such, particularly after the adoption of the BIMSTEC Charter during the 5th Summit in Colombo, it was found both necessary & urgent - to finalize the Rules of Procedures of different BIMSTEC Mechanisms. Accordingly, three Special BPWC Meetings (two in virtual and one in – person) were organized, to specifically discuss and complete the Rules of Procedures before the next Senior Officials' Meeting and Ministerial meeting.

I am happy to report that with these 3 meetings: The Rules of Procedure for Core BIMSTEC Mechanism, Rules of Procedure for Sectoral BIMSTEC Mechanism & Rules of Procedure for External Relations are now ready to be concluded with the finalization of 2 pending rules, which I am sure Myanmar will agree and concur today.

A lot of time and effort has been put forward by the present BPWC members and this perhaps might be the first time happening in BIMSTEC where 3 vital documents are concluded within a span of 5 months. I must take this opportunity to congratulate all the Delegates and the Chair for their willingness and effort to complete these documents well in time.

Eminent Persons' Group

The second Special BPWC meeting held in Dhaka in December 2022 also finalized the Terms of Reference of Eminent Persons Group and is now ready to be submitted to the 23rd BIMSTEC Senior Officials Meeting & 19th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting for endorsement and approval. In the mean time as we wait for endorsement, and in order to get this process moving, I would like to suggest to the Member States if we can start identifying Eminent Person Candidates from the respective countries.

BIMSTEC Development Fund

Distinguished Delegates, the importance of creation of BIMSTEC Development Fund was discussed in several forums including the 4th BIMSTEC Summit held in Kathmandu in 2018. The first BPWC meeting directed the Secretariat to develop a concept paper of BIMSTEC Development Fund and the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting asked the Secretariat to anchor the BIMSTEC Development Fund Meeting as there was no member state taking lead in this sector. As such, the Secretariat facilitated the First Meeting of the *Ad hoc* Expert Group on the Establishment of BIMSTEC Development Fund on 19 December 2022 and finalized its concept paper. The Report of the First Meeting is submitted to the 6th BPWC Meeting for its consideration.

BIMSTEC Quiz

BIMSTEC although is a 25 year old organization, it is hardly known by the peoples of our Member States. The importance of increasing BIMSTEC's visibility and "inclusion & engagement" of youth in the BIMSTEC process was emphasized several times in several forums. Considering this and to also commemorate the BIMSTEC Silver Jubilee, the Secretariat after receiving concurrences from all its seven member states is holding a BIMSTEC quiz on 14th of February in Thimphu. Two students guided by a teacher from each member state will participate. We have received nominations from all seven countries and we would like to sincerely thank all National Focal Points for their support.

I am positive that this event besides expanding BIMSTEC visibility through televisions and live social media coverage, our students during their few days in Thimphu will interact with each other, create memories and foster fraternal spirits that are essential for meaningful regional cooperation to take place.

Sectors of Cooperation

On the seven sectors of cooperation, the member states are taking their lead roles and responsibilities in their respective sectors. As directed by the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, Plan of Action of every sector is being discussed and developed while institutional mechanisms of sectors & sub sectors are being formed. However, we must also acknowledge that sectors such as Trade and Connectivity which had been placed a lot of importance by the leaders, has considerably slowed down in its progress.

The BIMSTEC Trade Negotiation Committee has met 21 times over the last 20 years but, it has still not been able to sign a single component of trade agreement. The BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity that took more than three years to finalize and which finally was adopted in the last Summit have not yet had a single meeting to coordinate its implementation while we are already moving forward preparing for the next Summit.

Distinguished Delegates, Since a lot of time and resources have been invested on these sectors, I felt it is pertinent to highlight these issues to the BPWC meeting today and the National Focal Points so that the lead countries and responsible bodies such as BIMSTEC Trade Negotiation Committee, and BIMSTEC Transport & Connectivity Working Group (BTCWG) are reminded to expedite in taking them forward.

As I said earlier, in the last 5 months, we had two BPWC meetings and three Special BPWC meetings, during which many important decisions and recommendations have been made some of which need to be implemented as early as possible. We are happy that we have received concurrences from all member states for the 23rd BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting and 19th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting.

Lastly to conclude my opening remarks, I would like to thank Thailand as the Chair Country, and all the other Heads of Delegations for convening five BPWC meetings with a period of five months. The decision to insert Special BPWC meetings focusing on completion of Rules of Procedure and other key documents such as TOR of EPG between the 5th and 6th BPWC meetings, turned out to be very effective and fruitful. This, I feel is a very positive trend the present BPWC Delegates have initiated and we hope it will be continued in future as well.

With this I conclude my remarks; the Secretariat is as always at your disposal and we look forward to another very successful BPWC meeting.

Thank you.
