

Special Remarks by H.E. Mr. Tenzin Lekphell,
Secretary-General of BIMSTEC
at the Regional Seminar on Food Security and Sustainable Food Systems in BIMSTEC
25 January 2023, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar [Virtual]

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- o **Mr. Kyaw Swe Lin, Director General, Department of Planning of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, of the Government of Myanmar**
- o **Distinguished Participants**
- o **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Good Morning!

01. It is a privilege for me to address this Seminar with the objective to exchange views on food security and sustainable food systems in the BIMSTEC region.

02. I would like to thank the Government of Myanmar, especially Department of Planning of Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation of Myanmar for holding the Seminar.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to the distinguished participants from the BIMSTEC Member States for their presence in this Seminar.

03. I believe that - the Seminar will be a good opportunity for the participants to deliberate and exchange views on - how to strengthen the cooperation in food security in the Bay of Bengal region, especially in this post-COVID-19 pandemic period - when it has become more challenging to maintain sustainable food security and nutritional goals.

Distinguished Participants

04. We are all aware - that the Bay of Bengal region is a home to around 1.8 billion people.

We also know that the economy of all BIMSTEC Member states, mostly depend on Agriculture.

Therefore, given its important role in the livelihoods of the people of all our Member States, Agriculture was included in 2005 as one of the core areas of BIMSTEC Cooperation.

Since then, Agriculture has been one of the most active sectors of BIMSTEC cooperation - and for this, we would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the Member States, and in particular Myanmar, for its active role as the Lead Country of this sector.

05. To further strengthen cooperation in agriculture among the Member States, BIMSTEC Agriculture Ministers recently met on 10th of November 2022, and adopted the Plan of Action on Strengthening BIMSTEC Agricultural Cooperation.

The Plan of Action has identified Seventeen Actions in Five areas of cooperation, with the objective to ensure food security, food safety, reduce rural poverty and increase resilience to climate change.

06. Today's Seminar - **on Food Security and Sustainable Food Systems in BIMSTEC** is one of the first projects being implemented under this new Plan of Action.

I would like to once again commend Myanmar - for taking this initiative to start implementing the Plan of Action.

Distinguished Participants,

07. Food Security is a critical issue for all countries. According to FAO, more than 800 million people were affected by hunger in 2021; around 2.3 billion people were moderately or severely food insecure; and about 45 million children under the age of five - are still suffering from malnutrition.

These famine, hunger, and malnutrition are not natural forces. They are the product of our collective actions—or lack thereof.

08. With regard to BIMSTEC, one of the biggest challenges facing our member countries in terms of food security - is the increasing demand for food due to population growth.

Studies reveal - that the population of the BIMSTEC region is projected to reach 2.1 billion by 2050 - and this means - our region will have to produce 70% more food to meet the growing demand.

09. Another big challenge on food production is the impact of climate change.

Our BIMSTEC region is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as extreme weather events and sea level rise, which makes it more difficult to produce food.

10. And to make matters worse, Covid-19 pandemic in the recent years has worsened the entire situation - influencing many areas of food system transformation - including labor mobility, employment and on- and off-farm income.

11. Therefore, to ensure food security, reduce hunger, reduce malnutrition and transform the food system sustainably, - the need to come together – and strengthen our collective efforts - has become ever more critical.

Distinguished Participants,

12. Today's Seminar is a very timely initiative, especially in this time of pandemic recovery.

I am sure the participants will exchange views, share expertise, information and provide policy recommendations on how to address these challenges - related to food security and a sustainable food system in the BIMSTEC region.

13. To conclude, I would like to assure that, the Secretariat is committed to assist the Seminar and make deliberations fruitful.

With this, I would like to wish the Regional Seminar on Food Security and Sustainable Food Systems in BIMSTEC - a great success.

Thank you.