

**Special Remarks by H.E. Mr. Tenzin Lekphell,
Secretary General of BIMSTEC at the
First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Himalayan Science Council
(12 October 2021, New Delhi, India) (Virtual)**

His Excellency Dr. Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India

Heads of Delegations and Delegates from the BIMSTEC Member States;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good morning!

It is indeed an honour and a privilege to address this First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Himalayan Science Council, which is being held today virtually. At the outset, I wish to express my deep gratitude to the Government of India, in particular, the Ministry of Earth Sciences, for hosting this long-awaited Expert Group Meeting on Himalayan Science Council. My sincere appreciation also goes to all the Member States for nominating their representatives to form this Expert Group. I would also like to thank all delegates for their participation in this important Meeting today.

Excellency & Distinguished Delegates,

The ecosystem of the Bay of Bengal largely depends on the rivers that originate from the Himalayas. The rivers flow through many Member States of BIMSTEC and as such, a large number of populations of this region in various ways are dependent on the river systems that start from the Himalayas.

The Himalayas, also named as the Third Pole by some scientists, has the largest concentration of snow and ice besides the Arctic and Antarctic regions. Unfortunately, the Himalayan system today is experiencing deteriorating changes due to climate change and global warming. The glaciers in the Himalayan ranges are increasingly melting, which is causing sea levels to rise and rivers to flood that directly impacts the farms, villages, cities, and livelihood of the people of Bay of Bengal Region. Ecological interdependence from High Himalayan Mountains to Deep seas calls urgently for a stronger collaboration and a firm partnership amongst the countries in BIMSTEC Region.

Excellency & Distinguished Delegates.

Realizing the deterioration of the Himalayan ecology causing frequent natural disasters in the region, the First Meeting of BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs held in New Delhi on 21 March 2017 decided to set up a BIMSTEC Himalayan Science Council to study the health of the Himalayan ecological system comprehensively and promote scientific cooperation among the respective institutions in the BIMSTEC Member States. The National Security Chiefs also decided to establish a BIMSTEC Expert Group to prepare a Concept Paper and a Plan of Action in this regard.

I am happy to recall that the Experts on the BIMSTEC Himalayan Science Council has already drafted and negotiated '*the BIMSTEC Concept Paper on the Proposal for the Himalaya Science Council*' in its First Workshop held in December 2019 in Goa. And today, we are gathered once again with the Experts from Member States to finalize this Concept Paper.

As the Himalayas is deteriorating everyday and the lives of the people in the Bay of Bengal are affected daily, it has become all the more reason for all of us to expedite setting up the BIMSTEC Himalayan Science Council that will study the security impact of ecological and environmental degradation of the Himalayas and help alleviate disasters in the region.

To conclude, I would like to assure that the Secretariat is at the disposal of the Member States and the Meeting today. We look forward to a fruitful deliberation and a pragmatic outcome. I have asked my colleague Mr. Mosharaf Hossain, Director in-charge of the Security Division at the BIMSTEC Secretariat to provide all necessary help and support. With this, I wish today's Meeting - a great success.

Thank you.
