

First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission

20 September 2021, Bhutan (Virtual)

- H. E. Dasho Sonam Wangyel, Secretary, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan
- Distinguished Members of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC);
- Delegates of the BIMSTEC Member States;
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning!

It is an honour and a privilege to address the **First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission**, which is being held today virtually.

To begin with, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Royal Government of Bhutan, in particular, the Department of Culture, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs - for hosting this long awaited first Meeting of the **BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission**. My sincere appreciation goes to all the Member States for nominating their representatives to form the Commission. I would also like to thank all delegates particularly the designated members of **BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC)** for their participation in this important Meeting today.

Excellency & Distinguished Delegates,

The BIMSTEC region represents one of the most diverse regions of the world, climatically, racially, culturally, linguistically and ethnically. With this shared cultural heritage, our countries also share a tremendous potential to become a leading player in the cultural industries.

Recognizing the pluralistic nature of our societies and shared cultural heritage that provide ample opportunity for multi-dimensional cooperation within the Bay of Bengal region, the Leaders at the First BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok on 31 July 2004 agreed to include Culture as one of the fourteen sectors of cooperation in BIMSTEC with Bhutan as the Lead Country.

The BIMSTEC provided an opportunity to explore how regional collaboration may build on the cultural richness of South and South-East Asia to enhance and preserve the strength of the region's cultural diversity. Recently, however these fourteen sectors of cooperation have been reconstituted and rationalized into seven core sectors with each Member State taking responsibility to lead a sector. While the formal adoption of this arrangement will take place at the 5th BIMSTEC Summit, which is likely to take place in December this year, the Secretariat

has already started the process of working towards this end. Under this rationalization, **Nepal** is now the Lead Country for Culture.

Excellency & Distinguished Delegates,

To give a brief overview of the developments in this sector; the First BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Culture was held in Paro, Bhutan in May 2006. It was at this Meeting that the “Paro Initiative” was introduced and adopted. The Initiative called for focus on cultural industries as an enabler towards poverty reduction and community vitalization in our region. Therefore, to achieve this goal, the establishment of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) and the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO) in Bhutan were considered as key components of the Paro Initiative.

As mandated by the First Ministerial Meeting on Culture, an Expert Group Meeting on Culture was held in India in 2006, which finalized the draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the establishment of BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) and the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO). Subsequently, the Leaders at the Second BIMSTEC Summit held in New Delhi in November 2008, supported the establishment of the Commission and Observatory in Bhutan. And in 2014, the Member States signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) and the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO) during the Third BIMSTEC Summit held in Myanmar.

The process has been rather prolonged; we are behind in setting up this institute by 7 years after signing the MOU. Nevertheless, I am happy to note that the process is moving forward. The BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission is now established and Meeting today to discuss on a way forward plan of action.

Excellency & Distinguished Delegates,

The Commission is the Governing Board of the Cultural Industries Observatory, and therefore it is the apex body that is responsible for policy direction and supervision of the Observatory. It is also mandated to develop plans and programmes as envisioned by the Paro Initiative and as well as ensure its implementation.

Therefore, the role of this Commission is of utmost importance in not only ensuring the success of the Observatory but also in advancing cultural collaboration that will benefit the grassroots of the region. Since this is the First Meeting of the Commission, my colleague Dr Damaru will be making a presentation during the technical discussion today to give a brief background on **BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission** and **BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory**.

Excellency & Distinguished Delegates,

While the MoU stipulates an annual BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission Meeting, I would like to suggest that you consider meeting more frequently initially, since the task before you is not just substantive, but the stake of establishing the BIMSTEC Cultural Industry Observatory now lies in the hands of the Commission. I would also like to recommend that at today's Meeting, you may like to consider drawing up a plan of action that will guide you in the process towards establishing the Cultural Observatory.

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 from this Meeting. I have asked my colleague Dr. Damaru, Director in-charge of Cultural Cooperation at the BIMSTEC Secretariat, to provide all necessary support.

With this, I would like to wish the first BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission meeting - a great success.

Thank you.