

**Remarks by Secretary General at the 5th Meeting of the
BIMTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks
21st December 2020
New Delhi, India**

Your Excellency, Ms. Riva Ganguly Das, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

Professor Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General, RIS, India

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure for me to join the 5th Meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks being held virtually today. I would like to thank the Government of India and the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) in particular, for hosting this timely meeting. As you may know, I have recently joined the BIMSTEC Secretariat as the Secretary General and I am indeed very happy to be able to meet and welcome all the distinguished delegates to this important meeting.

Hon'ble Delegates

As you are aware, People-to-People Contact is one of the main areas of cooperation within the fourteen priority areas of BIMSTEC. Right from the first Summit held in Bangkok, on 31st July 2004, people to people contact was decided and included as an area of cooperation among the Member States.

To reinforce the decision of the First Summit and further promote people to people contact among the BIMSTEC Member State, the Second Summit held in New Delhi, in November 2008 established the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks.

The Fourth Summit held in Kathmandu, in August 2018 further agreed to expand the scope of people to people contact to include academia, media, parliamentarians, and cultural organizations.

Therefore, the promotion of interaction to deepen trust and understanding amongst the people of our countries was always highlighted as an important aspect of cooperation by our leaders at every Summit to achieve the shared vision of securing a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable Bay of Bengal region.

Distinguished Delegates

Efforts are underway to realize some other people to people contact platforms such as BIMSTEC Business forum, Forum for media and parliamentarians and few others but currently the only operational forum in this area is the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks and I am happy that this network is meeting again today to discuss some more pertinent issues of the region and recommend policies on how BIMSTEC can move forward.

Some major recommendations emerging from the BNPTT Meetings have been implemented, the foremost being the establishment of the Secretariat in 2014 that has greatly helped BIMSTEC in achieving some of its objectives.

We look forward to the Charter to be signed at the forthcoming Summit which we hope takes place sometime in the next few months. The rationalization of the sectors into seven core areas with sub sectors has been endorsed by the Senior Officials' meeting and we are waiting for it to be approved in the next Ministerial Meeting and the Summit.

For the BIMSTEC Network of Think Tanks in particular, as you are aware, the Terms of Reference has now been finalized with all Member States giving their concurrences. With the adoption of the ToR by the Ministerial Meeting I am optimistic that this forum will meet regularly and pick up momentum through a robust action plan.

Before I conclude, on behalf of all my colleagues in the Secretariat and on my own behalf I would like to express our appreciation to your Excellency Ms. Das for your presence today. This is the second time that we are meeting virtually and it's a pleasure to meet you again today.

I would also like to thank all the honourable delegates from the member states for your support and cooperation. I understand BNTT has contributed significantly in the past in guiding and strengthening BIMSTEC and we hope you will continue to extend the same vigour and support. I and my team in the Secretariat look forward to receiving some innovative policy recommendations today that will further help achieve our shared objectives and take the region forward.

Thank you