

**Special Remarks by the Secretary General of BIMSTEC at the Closing Session of
International Conference on “Sustainable Blue Economy for the Development of
Bangladesh”**

University of Dhaka, Wednesday, 24 April 2019 at 1530 hrs

- Professor Dr. AFM Ruhul Haque, MP, Chairman, Standing Committee on Ministry of Science & Technology, Bangladesh National Parliament
- Prof. Dr. A.S.M. Maksud Kamal, Dean, Faculty of Earth & Environmental Sciences, University of Dhaka
- Dr. Malcolm Dickson, Country Director, WorldFish, Bangladesh & South Asia
- Mr. Raquibul Amin, Country Head, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- Mr. S.M. Formanul Islam, CEO, Bangladesh Infrastructure Finance Fund Limited, Ministry of Finance
- Mr. Lutfor Rahman, Executive Director & CEO, GreenTech Foundation Bangladesh
- Mr. Jobaer Alam, Chairman, Department of Oceanography, University of Dhaka
- Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. *Good afternoon.*

01. Let me begin by thanking the Green Tech Foundation for organizing this international conference on the theme ‘*Sustainable Blue Economy for the Development of Bangladesh*’. I am happy to note that leaders and experts from government, academia and trade bodies having a stake in the Bay of Bengal have participated in this seminar.

02. Although the concept “blue economy” is relatively new, our ancestors were aware of the economic importance of oceans and seas. Fishing and maritime trade have been some of the oldest ways to use the oceans and seas for economic benefits. With the increasing pressure on resources available on the land, there has been a renewed interest in recent times to exploit resources from the oceans and seas. The availability of better technology has increased economic activities surrounding oceans and seas, including but not limited to aquaculture, marine biotechnology, fishing, maritime transport, maritime and coastal tourism, extraction of mineral resources, offshore oil and gas exploration, shipbuilding and ship repair, offshore wind power and tidal power, carbon sequestration, waste disposal and management, and protection of biodiversity. The novelty in the concept of blue economy perhaps lies in the fact that it talks about both exploitation as well as conservation of the marine resources.

03. The Bay of Bengal, covering nearly 2.2 million square km of maritime space is the largest bay in the world. A large population of the BIMSTEC Member States including Bangladesh is dependent on the Bay of Bengal for food and livelihood. The membership of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) includes five coastal states of the Bay of Bengal (namely Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand) and two states (namely Bhutan and Nepal) that are not coastal states but are economically and ecologically closely linked with the Bay of Bengal. BIMSTEC has, therefore, an abiding interest in the sustainable and peaceful use of the resources of the Bay of Bengal. Out of BIMSTEC’s 14 (fourteen) sectors of cooperation, six sectors namely trade, transport, energy, fisheries, environment and climate change are directly linked with the optimum use of the Bay of Bengal. Significant progress has been made in finalizing BIMSTEC coastal shipping agreement. Enhanced maritime connectivity will provide lower logistic costs and will lead to increased trade in goods and services among the BIMSTEC Member States. Another sector of BIMSTEC cooperation, Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Sector (CTTC), promotes collaboration among Member States to keep the Bay of Bengal free from non-traditional security threats like terrorism, drug trafficking and human trafficking, illegal fishing, smuggling of arms and piracy.

04. While the Bay of Bengal had its historical perspective primarily as a trade route, today we are looking at it as an opportunity from a much wider perspective. BIMSTEC as a group will need to explore how the people in the region are benefitted from the abundance of the Bay, bearing in mind that we have so far tapped very little of the enormous economic potential that the Bay of Bengal holds for us. From business houses with capital intensive projects like mineral exploration to small marginal fishermen with basic fishing equipment, all have stake in the sea around us. At the same time, it is also important to enhance cooperation in the safety and security of the Bay of Bengal encompassing maintaining safer trade route, environmental protection, climate change issues and disaster management.

05. Like all other regional and international organizations, BIMSTEC's objective is to support national developmental efforts of Member States, and not to become a substitute for it. The same is true in case of blue economy. Bangladesh, as the most densely populated country in the world must use the blue economy potentials of the Bay of Bengal for economic development. To ensure sustainable use of marine resources, the first step will be to have full awareness of the maritime domain through surveys and research – an area where government, universities and industry will have to work together. Survey and application of appropriate technology can immensely expand the scope of fishing in the Bay of Bengal. Survey is also important to explore and exploit minerals and hydrocarbon. Ship building, a thrust sector in Bangladesh, has also been discussed by the speakers of today's seminar. We hope conservation aspect of the marine resources will also get equal importance in our deliberation; a case in point is the conservation of the largest mangrove forest in the world hosted together by Bangladesh and India. In particular, effective measures against illegal fishing and marine pollution will need regional collaboration. In order to begin deriving practical benefits from the Bay of Bengal, the policy makers of the region would need to frame guidelines or engage in project based cooperation in the area of blue economy. While doing so, we must take into account that two of the Member States of BIMSTEC

(i.e. Nepal and Bhutan) who do not have access to sea and hence no direct access to its resources. The policy so framed needs to take into account expectations from these two countries as well. Another key area is the technology transfer or facilitation particularly on seabed mineral exploration and renewable ocean energy.

06. BIMSTEC can and should lead the way to show how collective and sustainable use of the seas and oceans could be achieved, in the same way its Member States were able to settle maritime demarcation issues amicably. We expect Bangladesh being located at a strategic location in the Bay of Bengal region, will take a lead for sustainable use of the Bay of Bengal. Thank you.