

Welcome Remarks by H.E. M. Shahidul Islam, Secretary General of BIMSTEC on the occasion of the visit of His Excellency Dr. Lotay Tshering, Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bhutan to the BIMSTEC Secretariat

Friday, 12 April 2019 at 1415hrs-1445hrs.

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- **His Excellency Dr. Lotay Tshering, Hon'ble Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan**
- Her Excellency Dr. Ugyen Dema, Hon'ble First Lady of the Kingdom of Bhutan
- Hon'ble Ministers and other members of delegation from Bhutan
- His Excellency Mr. Nasrul Hamid, Hon'ble Minister of State for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, Government of Bangladesh
- Their Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners of BIMSTEC Member States, Ladies and gentleman: *Good afternoon.*

01. It gives me immense pleasure to welcome **His Excellency Dr. Lotay Tshering, Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bhutan, Her Excellency Dr. Ugyen Dema, Hon'ble First Lady of Bhutan** and all the accompanying delegates to the BIMSTEC Secretariat. We are grateful to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bhutan for taking out time from his extremely busy schedule to pay a brief visit to the BIMSTEC Secretariat. In fact, this is the first instance when a Head of Government of a BIMSTEC Member State is paying a visit to the BIMSTEC Secretariat [in its four-and-half-years of existence] since its inauguration by Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh in September 2014. Your Excellency's visit will therefore remain a major milestone in the history of BIMSTEC Secretariat.

02. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, better known by the acronym BIMSTEC, was established in 1997 with the objective to “create an enabling environment for rapid economic development through identification and implementation of specific cooperation projects in the sectors of trade, investment and industry, technology, human resource development, tourism, agriculture, energy, and infrastructure and transportation”. Since then, BIMSTEC has identified 14 sectors of cooperation to build a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Bay of Bengal region. The Governments of seven Member States are meeting regularly to lay down norms and rules to enhance intra-regional trade, transport connectivity, energy cooperation, counterterrorism and organized crime, and facilitate people-to-people contact to build mutual trust and confidence. Negotiations have resumed to conclude various agreements related to the establishment of BIMSTEC Free Trade Area; an MOU has been signed to establish BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection to facilitate electricity trade; BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement and Coastal Shipping Agreement are being negotiated to enhance transport connectivity; two major Conventions relating to combating terrorism and organized crime are at different levels of operationalization. With the increasing visibility of BIMSTEC, many regional and international organizations are showing keen interest to collaborate with BIMSTEC.

03. BIMSTEC is essentially a Member-State driven organization, with Member States acting as Lead Country for each of the 14 sectors of cooperation. Bhutan is the Lead Country for Cultural Cooperation sector. We are grateful to Bhutan for leading the activities of this important sector. But Bhutan’s contribution to BIMSTEC is not just limited to cultural area. As the Secretary General of BIMSTEC, I express my deep gratitude to

Your Excellency for the expeditious endorsement of the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit Declaration and the MOU for Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection signed during the 4th Summit *ad referendum* basis. Bhutan has recently conveyed its concurrence to the signing of the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters. During my visit to Bhutan in February 2019, I was also reassured by Your Excellency's Government that the ratification of BIMSTEC Convention on Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking will receive due consideration.

04. It is indeed heartening that Bhutan will be hosting two important BIMSTEC events this year, the 22nd Meeting of the Trade negotiation Committee (TNC) and the 9th Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (JWG-CTTC). We very much hope that the 22nd Trade Negotiating Committee meeting at Thimpu will enable us to cross the last hurdle to the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area.

05. BIMSTEC is based on the principle of sovereign equality and mutual benefit. For the success of BIMSTEC, it is important that we are mindful of special needs and circumstances of each and every Member State. For instance, special attention is needed to address the disadvantages faced by landlocked countries like Bhutan and Nepal as we implement transport connectivity initiatives. Similarly, other Member States can learn from Bhutan's success in building a carbon-neutral society.

06. Excellency, with these words I welcome you once again to the Secretariat and eagerly look forward to receiving your guidance and advice for better functioning of this organization. Thank you all.