

First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee
17-18 January 2019
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Special Remarks by the Secretary General of BIMSTEC

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates,
Senior officials of the government of Sri Lanka
Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the Government of Sri Lanka for hosting the first meeting of the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPWC). I would also like to thank all the delegates of the respective Member States for their participation in this important Meeting, possibly the most important meeting taking place after the 4th BIMSTEC Summit held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 30-31 August 2018.

02. The 4th BIMSTEC Summit Declaration contained several important decisions pertaining to institutional reforms and reinvigorating sectoral activities. A major decision was the establishment of this very BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPWC) “to deal with administrative and financial matters of the Secretariat and the BIMSTEC Centers and Entities, as well as to prepare schedule of meetings, prioritize and rationalize the organization’s activities”.

03. The Fourth BIMSTEC Summit also decided to (i) begin the process of drafting BIMSTEC Charter and Rules of Procedures, (ii) rationalize and prioritize BIMSTEC sectors of cooperation to bring focus in the work of the organization, (iii) strengthen the Secretariat with adequate manpower and resources, and (v) establish a BIMSTEC Development Fund. These subjects have been included in the agenda of the First BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPCW) being held today. The Secretariat has circulated the preliminary draft of BIMSTEC Charter and the draft Rules of Procedures (RoP) for the BIMSTEC Mechanisms.

04. On the subject related to the establishment of BIMSTEC Development Fund (BDF), no appreciable progress has been reported since the 4th Summit. The Secretariat believes that the experience of ASEAN and SAARC could be useful in developing the modalities for the establishment of the BIMSTEC Development Fund. As regards Restructuring and Rationalization of the existing areas of BIMSTEC cooperation, we hope that the Permanent Working Committee will be able to agree on the priority areas that are both important and achievable. The Administrative and Financing Mechanisms for the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Centres together with the Model Memorandum of Association (MoA) on the

Establishment of the BIMSTEC Centres/Entities is another important subject that has assumed urgency for the smooth operationalization of a number of BIMSTEC Centres.

05. The agenda of the meeting also includes relatively less complicated but important issues like establishing schedule of meetings in 2019, finalization of the MoU on Mutual Cooperation between Diplomatic Academies/Training Institutions of BIMSTEC Member States, finalization of Terms of Reference (ToR) of BIMSTEC Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) and Terms of References (ToR) for the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks (BNPTT). The administrative and budgetary questions include the estimated budget of the Secretariat for 2019, finalization of Procurement Procedure, finalization of the Administrative and Disciplinary Rules of the Secretariat. The Summit decided to increase the number of Directors at the Secretariat to seven; the modalities and budgetary aspects of their joining the Secretariat will also be discussed by the Meeting.

06. The Secretariat wishes to put on record its deep appreciation for the Member States for timely payment of their assessed contributions towards the budget of the Secretariat. The proposed budget for the Secretariat for the year 2019 is higher than the last year's, primarily because of two reasons: First, an amount of US\$ 317,750 has been proposed to fund three studies to be conducted by three BNPTT member think tanks; Second, expenditure related to the joining of at least one more Director in the Secretariat in 2019. It is also important to note that the commitment of Bangladesh to provide a free furnished accommodation for the Secretary General for five years will end in June 2019. Accordingly, the house rent of the Secretary General beginning July 2019 will have to be paid from the Secretariat's own budget. All proposals have been supported by context and justification.

07. I hope that the delegates got the opportunity to examine the notes circulated by the Secretariat, and will actively participate in today's Meeting in order to come up with practical and pragmatics recommendations to the next session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting for consideration. The Secretariat would like to assure the esteemed delegates of our full support in their deliberations during the course of the Meeting. I wish you all the best in your deliberations.

Thank you.
