

Secretary General's Report to the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit
Kathmandu, Nepal, 31 August 2018

01. The Right Hon'ble K.P. Sharma Oli
Hon'ble Prime Minister, Government of Nepal &
Chairperson of the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit;

02. Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina
Hon'ble Prime Minister, Government of Bangladesh

03. His Excellency Chief Justice Lyonpo Tshering Wangchuk
Hon'ble Chief Advisor, Interim Government of Bhutan

04. His Excellency Shri Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister, Government of India

05. His Excellency U Win Myint
Hon'ble President of Myanmar

06. His Excellency Maithripala Sirisena
Hon'ble President of Sri Lanka

07. His Excellency General Prayut Chan-o-Cha
Hon'ble Prime Minister, Government of Thailand

08. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning.

01. It is a great honour for me to speak before the BIMSTEC Leaders for the first time since my appointment as the Secretary General of BIMSTEC last year. I offer my profound appreciation to **The Right Hon'ble K.P. Sharma Oli, Hon'ble Prime Minister of Nepal** for hosting and chairing this historic Fourth BIMSTEC Summit in Nepal and for the excellent hospitality provided to all Member States and to the Secretariat.

02. I would like to offer my special thanks to **His Excellency Chief Justice Lyonpo Tshering Wangchuk, Hon'ble Chief Advisor of the Interim Government of Bhutan** for agreeing to join this Summit in spite of the special circumstances back home and thereby showing Bhutan's strong commitment to the BIMSTEC process.

03. The 4th BIMSTEC Summit is taking place at a time when BIMSTEC cooperation is entering its third decade of existence. Over the last two decades, BIMSTEC has been able to make considerable progress in setting up institutions, laying down legal framework, initiating project-based cooperation, facilitating capacity building and knowledge sharing and enhancing contacts and exchanges at various levels.

04. The Third BIMSTEC Summit held in 2014 under the chairmanship of Myanmar was an important milestone in the institution building process of BIMSTEC. The Summit witnessed the signing of three important legal instruments for the establishment of BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat in Bangladesh; BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO) in Bhutan; and BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate (BCWC) in India.

05. The permanent Secretariat of BIMSTEC became operational in Dhaka, Bangladesh following its formal inauguration on 13 September 2014. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to **Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh** for hosting the Secretariat in Dhaka, personally inaugurating the Secretariat and providing all the logistical support needed. Excellencies, I am happy to report that the Secretariat is fully functional to carry forward the BIMSTEC process.

06. A notable achievement of BIMSTEC's norm-setting role was the signing of the Framework Agreement on BIMSTEC Free Trade Area in 2004. Another important legal instrument namely BIMSTEC Convention on International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking signed in 2009 has received ratification of the great majority of the Member States.

07. The BIMSTEC process received fresh impetus at the Leaders Retreat held in Goa, India on 16 October 2016 when the Leaders reiterated their strong political commitment to make the organization stronger, more effective and result-oriented. I would like to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to **His Excellency Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India** for the initiative taken in this regard. The Leaders during their informal consultation at the Retreat agreed on a 16-point Agenda of Action aiming at completing the pending agreements and moving ahead with new initiatives. Excellencies, I am happy to report that in pursuance to the Agenda of Action, significant progress has been made to finalize the draft texts of three new agreements, namely, Agreement on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in Customs Matters, BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement and BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement. The draft text of the Trade Facilitation Agreement is currently under consideration of the Member States. Most Member States have expressed their readiness to sign BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters. Above all, the MOU for Establishing BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection is ready for signature during this Summit.

08. The norm-setting role will continue to dominate the activities of BIMSTEC for a number of reasons. While cooperation in combating terrorism and transnational crimes including drug trafficking and human trafficking will need utmost attention of the Member States, it will also be important to ensure seamless movement of goods, services, capital and human persons including businessmen, investors, scholars and tourists across the region. The conclusion of BIMSTEC FTA and ratification of counter terrorism and transnational crime related Conventions will therefore be a priority in the coming days. It is encouraging to note that after a gap of three years, Bangladesh as the Lead Country for Trade and Investment sector, is taking fresh initiative to resume FTA negotiations. I am happy to report that BIMSTEC Ministers have agreed to resume discussion on visa matters.

09. While BIMSTEC is expected to increasingly consolidate its identity as a community of Bay of Bengal nations, it will also be important to continue to leverage on its unique position of bridging South and South East Asia and remain open to enter into meaningful collaboration with entities having similar aims and objectives. It is heartening to see that Member States have agreed to develop BIMSTEC Charter, Rules of Procedure (RoP) of BIMSTEC Mechanisms and rules of engagement with other entities with similar aims and objectives during the past few days awaiting endorsement by the Summit.

10. However, the success of an organization does not necessarily depend on the number of legal instruments signed. This is true when we consider the general consensus that exists among Member States on the importance of connectivity as the prime mover of regional integration process. Most Member States have taken initiatives towards implementation of projects identified by the ADB-assisted BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study in order to address the missing links to establish greater physical and economic connectivity between South and South East Asia. The BIMSTEC Member States are currently developing the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Master Plan with the target to complete it by the end of September 2018. I would like to record my deep appreciation and gratitude to **His Excellency General Prayut Chan-o-Cha, Hon'ble Prime Minister of Thailand** for mooted the proposal to develop the BIMSTEC Master Plan on Connectivity and for developing the initial concept note on the subject.

11. Another important role being played by BIMSTEC is that the organization has developed into a useful platform to facilitate regular exchanges among the Governments of Member States, thereby narrowing down differences and creating common grounds for cooperation. Holding of 16 Ministerial Meetings and 19 Senior Officials' Meetings since the establishment of BIMSTEC demonstrate that the core meetings have attained a high degree of regularity. Similarly, the Annual Meeting of BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs, a forum created at the Goa Retreat in 2016, has already held two meetings - in March 2017 in New Delhi and in March 2018 in Dhaka - and is scheduled to meet again in Bangkok in March 2019.

12. Excellencies, food security is one of the key aspects of BIMSTEC cooperation as the region is home to almost one fourth of the World's population. **I wish to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to His Excellency U Win Myint, Hon'ble President of Myanmar** for the initiatives taken towards promoting agricultural cooperation and proposing to host the First BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture in 2019.

13. The Member States have identified poverty as the greatest regional challenge in realization of development objectives and have expressed their firm commitment to the eradication of poverty in the Bay of Bengal region by 2030 in line with the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. In this regard, **I am grateful to His Excellency Maithripala Sirisena, Hon'ble President of Sri Lanka** for hosting and personally inaugurating the Third BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 20 December 2017.

14. Hon'ble Chairman: The Fourth BIMSTEC Summit is an occasion to review the past achievements and to provide a clear roadmap for transforming BIMSTEC into a result-oriented organization. As stated by The Rt. Hon. Prime Minister of Nepal, the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit must assess BIMSTEC's role of past twenty years and chart out the future course of action in order to have positive impacts on the life of our peoples. It is hoped that the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit will provide clear directives to streamline the institutional structure, working method and priority fixing to realize the full potential of the BIMSTEC cooperation.

15. Before I conclude, Hon'ble Chairman, I would like to commend Nepal's strong leadership to the BIMSTEC process during the last four years, a process that culminates through the hosting of the historic Fourth BIMSTEC Summit. I would like to assure our Leaders that the Secretariat will extend its fullest support to the Member States in the implementation of the decisions of the Summit. Thank you.
