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**BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL
TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION**



Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting

29 August 2018

Kathmandu, Nepal

Report of the Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting

01. The Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 29 August 2018 to finalize the preparations for the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit being held in Kathmandu on 30-31 August 2018. The list of Ministers and the Heads of Delegation is at **Annex I**.

02. The Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was chaired by Hon'ble Mr. Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal.

03. The Ministers reviewed BIMSTEC's progress in the priority areas of cooperation since holding of the Fifteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 11 August 2017. They expressed satisfaction at the progress achieved in the past years and resolved to take necessary steps to bring focus in the activities of the organization by restructuring and streamlining the areas of cooperation. The texts of the statements delivered by the Heads of Delegation are at **Annex II-VIII**.

04. The Secretary General of BIMSTEC presented a Report to the Meeting, which is at **Annex IX**.

05. The Ministers considered and approved the Report of the Special Session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) held in Kathmandu on 11 August 2018 and the Report of the Nineteenth Session of the BIMSTEC SOM held in Kathmandu on 28 August 2018.

06. The Ministers endorsed the draft text of the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit Declaration, which is at **Annex X** and recommended it to the Leaders for approval.

07. The Ministers expressed their readiness to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Establishment of BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection. Bhutan reiterated that they will sign the MoU on an *ad referendum* basis.

08. The Ministers expressed appreciation to the Government of Nepal for carrying out the responsibility of Chairmanship from March 2014 to August 2018 and successfully hosting the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit in Kathmandu. They also appreciated the kind acceptance of the Government of Sri Lanka to assume the next Chairmanship of BIMSTEC.

09. The Ministers adopted the Report of the Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting and recommended its approval by the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit.



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Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting

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List of Ministers and the Heads of Delegation

Bangladesh

01. **His Excellency Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, MP**
Hon'ble Foreign Minister
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Bhutan

02. **His Excellency Ambassador Sonam Tshong**
Foreign Secretary and Head of Delegation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Royal Government of Bhutan

India

03. **His Excellency General (Dr.) Vijay Kumar Singh (Retd)**
Hon'ble Minister of State for External Affairs
Government of India

Myanmar

04. **His Excellency Mr. Kyaw Tin**
Hon'ble Union Minister for International Cooperation
Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Nepal

05. **His Excellency Mr. Pradeep Kumar Gyawali**
Hon'ble Foreign Minister
Government of Nepal

Sri Lanka

06. **His Excellency Vasantha Senanayake**
Hon'ble State Minister of Foreign Affairs
Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Thailand

07. **His Excellency Mr. Don Pramudwinai**
Hon'ble Minister of Foreign Affairs
Kingdom of Thailand

BIMSEC Secretariat

08. **His Excellency Mr. M Shahidul Islam**
Secretary General of BIMSTEC

Annex II



**Statement by His Excellency Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, M.P.,
Hon'ble Foreign Minister of the Government of the
People's Republic of Bangladesh**

16th Ministerial Meeting of BIMSTEC

**Kathmandu, Nepal
29 August 2018**

H.E. Mr. Pradeep Kumar Gyawali
Chairman of the 16th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

As-SalamuAlaikum, Namaste and a very good morning to you all.

I would like to convey my sincere congratulations to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of Nepal for assuming the Chair of the 16th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting. I would also thank the Government of Nepal for playing the leading role in efficiently running the Ministerial Meetings for the last four and a half years.

Mr. Chairman,

2. The Bay of Bengal comprising two vibrant areas of South Asia and South East Asia has huge potentials for forging substantive multi-sectoral cooperation. The region hosts 22% of global population with an above average of 6% GDP growth. Intra-trade among the BIMSTEC member states are still only 7% of global trade. Opportunities for huge economic, investment, trade and other potentials still remained unexploited. As one of the founding members of this organization, Bangladesh remains committed to the progress and prosperity of our peoples through BIMSTEC based collaboration.

Mr. Chairman,

3. Our meeting provided with an opportunity to take stock of what we did during the last four and a years since the 3rd BIMSTEC Summit in 2014 in Myanmar and the Goa Retreat in India in October 2016.

Excellencies,

4. Trade and Investment are two of the most critical sectors of BIMSTEC Cooperation. We are happy to note that BIMSTEC FTA was initiated in 2004. But subsequently there has been no progress since then. The umbrella agreement could not be finally adopted primarily due to lack of the commitment. Since 2004, there have been 20 sessions of Trade Negotiating Committee's meetings. Still none of the constituent legal documents could be made ready for signature. The same is the case with BIMSTEC proposed Agreement on Investment Cooperation.

Mr. Chairman

5. As the lead country for Trade and Investment Sectors, Bangladesh is deeply concerned with the FTA negotiation. Repeatedly, we had to postpone and reschedule the meeting of the 21st Trade Negotiating Committee on several times. We earnestly urge upon the distinguished member states to extend their cooperation in successfully concluding the FTA.

Excellency,

6. Presently all constituents documents are negotiated under one meeting in different sub-groups. This is a cumbersome process. We propose that the negotiation of these legal documents could be staggered among the relevant sub-groups who can meet independently and negotiate them. Each draft document demands full attention by all member states. It is imperative that each of them is negotiated in individual meeting dedicated to one draft at one time. In that case, different lead countries could host the meeting for each document. We feel this would bring out good results in expeditious negotiation of the pending legal documents.

Mr. Chairman,

7. Connectivity is another critical sector for BIMSTEC Cooperation. Bangladesh has been extending full support in concluding the essential documents needed for early operation of activities in this sector. I am happy to note that the drafting of the BIMSTEC Master Plan on Connectivity is now moving ahead. I am also happy to note that BIMSTEC Agreement on Motor Vehicle is also moving at full speed. BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement is almost at the final stage. We are hopeful that these vital documents on connectivity will be finalized by the end of this year.

Mr. Chairman,

8. Energy sector is another essential pillar of our cooperation. There are huge potentials in this area to enhance the levels of our partnership. I am happy to note that all of us are ready to sign the MoU on BIMSTEC Power Grid Interconnection during the 4th BIMSTEC Summit. Upon conclusion of this MoU, beyond connecting our power grids, we may explore additional avenue of engagements in this sector.

Mr. Chairman,

9. Technology is a critical factor and a strong enabler to transform our region to an integrated modern society. The establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facilities in Sri Lanka will facilitate our cooperation in Technology sector. We urge upon the need for intense research and development works and education for discovering appropriate technology for our region. Technology has both positive as well as adverse impacts in our existing flow of progress. We have to keep a balanced approach and be mindful of such disruptive technology while being innovative.

Excellencies,

10. Poverty is our common enemy in the Bay of Bengal Region. I am happy to note that the last meeting of BIMSTEC Economic Ministers held in Colombo in 2017 and the Expert Groups Meeting held earlier in 2017 in Nepal adopted the BIMSTEC Poverty Plan of Action. We have to implement this Plan of Action into reality to alleviate poverty from our region.

Excellencies,

11. We have to protect and secure our development and prosperity by forging cooperation in combating terrorism and other security threats. Bangladesh hosted the 2nd Meeting of Security Chiefs in Dhaka in March this year which adopted a good number of decisions and generated some meaningful ongoing events. The 8th Meeting of the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crimes (CTTC) was hosted by Bangladesh earlier this month. The meeting recommended some pragmatic suggestions for approval and implementation. I am happy to mention that Bangladesh is ready to sign the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters.

Mr. Chairman,

12. I would reiterate that the existing 14 areas of cooperation in BIMSTEC are very much relevant and effective for our collective progress. The lead country arrangement to move the sectoral cooperation is also an effective mechanism. However, it is also notable that activities and engagements in all 14 sectors are not moving ahead at an even pace. With the fast changing global scenario, new areas of cooperation are drawing our attention. Blue Economy, Mountain Economy, Security of Himalayan Ecosystem, respective civil society and business sector cooperation are some of the newer areas. It is therefore imperative that we review our areas of cooperation and make necessary readjustments through restructuring and prioritizing and ideally clustering them to bring synergy and focus. We also feel the BIMSTEC Secretariat should also be strengthened with adequate human and financial resources to enable it to carry our added responsibility. Bangladesh as the host country would do everything possible on its part.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. On the eve of the 4th BIMSTEC Summit, I would urge upon the distinguished Foreign Ministers and Heads of Ministerial Delegations to renew their pledge for working closely towards building a new BIMSTEC as an efficient and high performing result oriented Organization.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.

Long Live BIMSTEC Spirit
Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu

Annex III

**STATEMENT FOR THE SIXTEENTH BIMSTEC MINISTERIAL MEETING
ON 29TH AUGUST 2018 IN KATHMANDU, NEPAL**

Your Excellency, Mr. Pradeep Kumar Gyawali,

Hon. Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal & Chairman of the 16th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting,

Honourable Foreign Ministers and distinguished Heads of delegations

The Secretary General of BIMSTEC

Excellencies

Ladies & Gentlemen.

A very good morning and Namaste!

At the outset, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Government of Nepal for the warm reception and excellent arrangements made for our participation in this very important meeting.

It is also my honour to extend my delegation's warm greetings to the hon'ble ministers.

Let me also convey my appreciation to the BIMSTEC Secretary General and his team for the excellent documentations.

Bhutan being in an election mode, an Interim Government headed by a Chief Advisor and assisted by a few Advisors are presently running the day to day affairs of the government of Bhutan.

Bhutan remains fully committed to make BIMSTEC a dynamic, responsive and effective regional organization that contributes to realizing the shared dreams and aspirations of our peoples.

It is in this spirit that despite our Constitutional limitations on the mandates of the Interim Government, the Interim Government decided to participate in the fourth BIMSTEC Summit and its preceding meetings. In this regard, allow me to express our sincere appreciation to the member states for their understanding and cooperation which has enabled the Interim Government to participate and sign on an ad referendum basis.

Excellencies,

Since its establishment in 1997, BIMSTEC has provided the seven member states a platform for deepening partnership, unlocking opportunities, and creating an enabling environment for building stronger ties and cooperation for the benefit and well-being of our peoples. In the process, it has enhanced regional integration and fostered common understanding among the peoples of the region and brought us much closer. In the last 21 years, we have achieved much. We now have a clear idea of what is aspirational, what is doable and what needs to be done.

In this regard, Bhutan welcomes and supports the initiatives being taken to rationalize the areas of cooperation and review the institutional mechanisms, which are aimed towards making BIMSTEC a more activity driven and result oriented organization.

Excellencies,

While we are participating on an ad referendum basis, I want assure that as soon as the next newly elected government of Bhutan is in place by first week of November 2018, we will report and follow up on the commitments we make at the Summit.

Thank you.

Annex IV

**Statement by H.E. General (Dr.) Vijay Kumar Singh (Retd.)
Minister of State for External Affairs of India
at the 16th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting
29 August 2018, Kathmandu, Nepal**

Your Excellency Mr. Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, Foreign Minister of Nepal
Your Excellencies Foreign Ministers of BIMSTEC Member States
Secretaries, Secretary General of BIMSTEC
Distinguished delegates

At the outset I congratulate Your Excellency Mr. Pradeep Kumar Gyawali on your election as Chairperson of this meeting. I also convey our gratitude to the Government of Nepal for their warm welcome and hospitality.

Let me also express our appreciation for the efforts put in by the Secretary General and his team for preparing substantive outcomes for the Summit. I look forward to the report by Secretary General informing us on the work done and the progress made so far.

Excellencies,

India accords utmost priority to BIMSTEC. It fulfills our key foreign policy priorities of 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East'. The Bay of Bengal has shaped our history and will also mould our future.

BIMSTEC represents over one-fifth of the humanity and has a combined GDP of close to US\$ 2.9 trillion. It brings together like minded countries with a common commitment for peace and prosperity of its people.

We are meeting at a crucial time when BIMSTEC has completed 21 years. As in the life of individuals, so in the life of an organization, twenty one (21) years is supposed to mark a turning point. It is a time when the edifice that has been built to energize the organization is given the much needed momentum. Since the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat held in Goa in October 2016, steady progress has been made in translating our Leaders' vision for the region into tangible action for implementing 'Agenda of Action' decided by our Leaders. Sustained efforts of all Member States have resulted in significant progress in cooperation in priority areas.

Excellencies,

I am happy to note the progress made in various priority areas of cooperation, including in areas of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime; Transport and Communication; Tourism; Environment and Disaster Management, where India is the lead country.

Regional trade and growth in the region can not be achieved without ensuring hard as well as soft infrastructure for enhanced connectivity. Progress has been made on the Master Plan for BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity, BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping and Motor Vehicles Agreement. We need to finalize these Agreements, along with BIMSTEC FTA in Goods, Services and Investment, Trade Facilitation and Customs Cooperation Agreements at the earliest to achieve smoother flow of cross-border trade and people across the region.

Excellencies,

An environment of peace and security is essential for achieving common goals of development and prosperity for our people. Our region faces both traditional and non-traditional security challenges. Terrorism remains the most significant threat to peace and stability in the region.

Cooperation in security domain is of special salience under BIMSTEC. BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs have met twice, in 2017 in New Delhi and in 2018 in Dhaka, and have underscored the importance of recognizing the Bay of Bengal as common security space and agreed to work collectively to deal with our common challenges. In the last two years, close security cooperation not only continued in the areas of counter terrorism, anti-money laundering, drugs and human trafficking, but has also diversified to include new areas of cyber security and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR). The two important BIMSTEC Conventions on Counter-Terrorism and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, when in force, will provide a robust legal framework to boost our cooperation in this sector.

Due to its geo-climatic conditions, BIMSTEC region faces many disasters including floods, earthquakes and cyclones that can potentially derail its growth trajectory. Building regional capacities for coordinated disaster response, risk reduction and rehabilitation is important in this regard. The first BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise hosted by India in October 2017 was a step in this direction. I am happy to note that the Inaugural Governing Board Meeting of the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate was held last month in Noida. The Centre will work to build regional capability to combat the challenges posed due to Climate Change and Weather excesses.

Excellencies,

We share common cultural heritage, developed over several thousand years ago. This common heritage needs to be cultivated into a global brand by promoting mutual

understanding and contacts between our peoples. Intra-regional Tourism got a boost with the launch of BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators in 2017 in New Delhi. Intra-BIMSTEC tourism circuits, joint marketing strategies, capacity building and theme based tourism, including Buddhist circuits can go a long way in promoting brand BIMSTEC. Traditional Medicine is another area of immense potential. I am happy to note that the BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine held its first meeting last year in India with a view to strengthen the role of traditional medicine for holistic health care.

To promote cooperation and understanding among our Diplomatic Corps, India has proposed an MoU among Diplomatic Academies of BIMSTEC Member States. This will be helpful in capacity building of our diplomats, as well as in promoting better understanding of common strengths and challenges in the region.

Excellencies,

BIMSTEC is at a critical juncture in its journey. The 4th BIMSTEC Summit can be a watershed moment for our region. Our people have high expectations from the Summit. We hope that the Summit would consolidate internal processes and reform the institutions to make the organization more focused and result-oriented. The drafting of Charter, setting up of the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee, rationalization of sectors of cooperation and exploring the possibility of setting up a Fund for regional projects focusing on improving connectivity and infrastructure across the region, will be important steps in that direction. Signing of the MoU on Inter-Grid Connection will be crucial for energy cooperation in the region. Most importantly the Summit will demonstrate the political commitment at the highest level and provide clear directions for all of us to take forward our regional cooperation to further heights.

I want to reiterate India's sincere and abiding commitment to work with BIMSTEC Member States to make our region safer, stronger and prosperous.

I look forward to the fruitful and productive discussions at the meeting.

Thank you

Annex V

**National Statement by H.E U Kyaw Tin, Union Minister for International Cooperation
of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar at Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting**

29 August 2018, Kathmandu, Nepal

**Mr. Chairman, Your Excellency Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali,
Excellencies,
Secretary General of BIMSTEC,
Distinguished Delegates,**

- I am delighted to be back in this majestic city of Kathmandu for the Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting.
- I congratulate Your Excellency Mr. Pradeep Kumar Gyawali on your assumption as the Chair of this Meeting. I also wish to thank the Government and the people of Nepal for the warm and generous hospitality accorded to us since our arrival.

Mr. Chair,

- **It has been over two decades since BIMSTEC was established by Bangkok Declaration to forge our strength together to prosper together through economic cooperation. Since then the number of member state has grown from 4 to magnificent seven.**
- **I hardly need to stress the potential of our 7-member BIMSTEC regional grouping.**
- BIMSTEC region is a vast market as one and a half billion people, constituting about 21 percent of the world 's population, reside in this region.
- With its combined GDP of US\$ 2.7 trillion, BIMSTEC's combined economic strength presents immense opportunities and possibilities for the socio-economic development of the region.
- However, there are many challenges confronting our region such as poverty, food security, frequent and severe natural disaster, growing threat of terrorism. Acting alone, each country cannot overcome those challenges. Only through cooperation in unity, we can overcome those challenges. We must therefore work together to redouble our concerted efforts to make those challenges to opportunities.
- That's why BIMSTEC was founded two decades ago to forge our common strength together to make our region a peaceful, prosperous an sustainable.

Mr. Chair,

- As the BIMSTEC is entering the third decade of its existence, it is high time to take stock of BIMSTEC achievements. We must also assess its weakness and strength and chart out a future direction.
- Our discussion must focus on how we should strengthen BIMSTEC and how we should make it more responsive to the needs of our peoples and to make it more affective and action-oriented.
- Looking back its 21-year of journey, I am happy to note that even though our efforts have not yet met our expectations in all sectors, the objectives of BIMSTEC Cooperation have been gradually materialized to a certain extent.
- As a significant achievement of the Third BIMSTEC Summit held in Nay Pyi Taw in 2014, the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat has started its functions in Dhaka since May 2014. We thank the Government of Bangladesh for providing the premises for the secretariat.
- The Outcome Document of the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat held in Goa, India on 16 October 2016, provided us as guidelines for future direction of BIMSTEC cooperation. I also thank the Government of India for hosting that important event and for highlighting us the good future for BIMSTEC.
- BIMSTEC today is a loose entity without any legal-based framework.
- In order to effectively implement directives of the Leaders, we should formulate Rules of Procedure of the BIMSTEC institutional mechanism as an element of essential.
- Therefore, we welcome the establishment of BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPWC) to deal with the administrative and financial matters of Organization at its fullest extent. We hope that BPWC will find ways to prioritize its cooperative sectors and find innovative ways to strengthen the work of BIMSTEC. In this regard, we welcome Thailand's proposal to focus on a few priority sectors.
- As 70 percent of its population live in rural areas relying on agricultural sector, poverty alleviation and agriculture is one of the top priority areas. As Myanmar is also facing shortage of electricity, its priority also include energy sector. That's why we have chosen this two sectors, Agriculture and Energy as our priority.

Mr. Chair,

- Agriculture is key to achieving sustainable development and eradicating hunger and poverty in the BIMSTEC region in accordance with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

- I am pleased to note that our Agricultural Expert Group has identified the Areas of future cooperation with an aim of sharing benefit in the region.
- In order to enhance our cooperation in this significant sector, Myanmar, as a lead country, decided to host the First BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture in 2019.

Mr. Chair,

- The sustainable supply of energy plays vital role in the pursuit of sustainable development. In the process of ensuring access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy in the region, we should intensify our effort to promote the development of economically viable, renewable energy, technology and its utilization.
- I believe that the establishment of BIMSEC Energy Center will provide assistance in coordinating and strengthening cooperation in BIMSTEC region by promoting experience sharing and capacity building. Therefore, we need to intensify our concerted efforts for early operationalization of the BIMSTEC Energy Center.
- I am pleased to note that all Member States will be able to sign the MoU for establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection in this Summit.

Mr. Chair,

- Connectivity and people-to-people contact is crucial to understand each other and strengthening cooperation among the Member States. I am sure that it will also facilitate smooth flows of goods, services and people. The improvement of connectivity requires us to invest more in infrastructure and human resource development.
- We also noted the progress in preparation of the draft BIMSTEC Master Plan on Transport Connectivity which would be a key to the regional integration. The success of connectivity will be dependent on the peace and stability of border areas of member states.
- Taking this opportunity, I would like to express our sincere thanks to the ADB for its continued support.

Mr. Chair,

- Adoption of Colombo Statement on Poverty Alleviation at Third BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation in Colombo, Sri Lanka, a follow up effort of "Poverty Action Plan" adopted in 2012, renewed our commitment to intensify our efforts in eliminating poverty in the BIMSTEC.

Mr. Chair,

- Terrorism has emerged as one of the most pressing security challenges around the world today.
- In recent years, we have witnessed a number of terrorist attacks all over the world which claimed many innocent lives, caused widespread destruction, undermined social stability.
- I firmly believe that no nation can suppress terrorism alone. We must be united in standing together against the threat of terrorism in our region.
- We deposited the Instrument of Ratification of the Convention on BIMSTEC Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking in July 2016.
- We welcome the outcomes of the First and Second BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs Meeting held in New Delhi in 2017 and Dhaka in 2018 respectively. We welcome the establishment of new BIMSTEC Sub-Group on the Cooperation on Countering Radicalization and Terrorisms under CTTC sector.
- In recent years, Myanmar has hosted various meetings under BIMSTEC CTTC sector including the Third and Fourth Meeting of BIMSTEC Subgroup on Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursor Chemicals, the Seventh Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Legal and Law Enforcement and the Ninth Meeting of BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism.
- Myanmar has been suffering from the scourge of terrorism. Therefore, Myanmar attaches its great importance to the issues of terrorism and trans-national crime. Myanmar is actively participating in the various counter-terrorism cooperation not only within BIMSTEC but also beyond the region.

Mr. Chair,

- One of the objectives of the 1997 Bangkok Declaration is to accelerate the economic growth and social progress in the sub-region. Towards this end, promotion of intra and inter trade and investment should be put our emphasis.
- While appreciating the progress of negotiation on the Agreement on Trade in Goods and the Agreement on Customs Cooperation, I would like to highlight the importance of early conclusion of BIMSTEC Free Trade Area (FTA) negotiations.

Mr. Chair,

- BIMSTEC is well deserved of congratulations on the progress made since its inception 21 years ago. But we recognize there is still much that remains to be done to achieve our goals of peace, prosperity and sustainability.
- BIMSTEC is to meet its founding objectives within its limitations and constraints. Therefore, we have to prioritize some of our projects for the implementation.
- We understand that securing the funding to implement our projects is one of the matter of concern for BIMSTEC.
- We should find ways and means to expand our engagements and cooperation with the development partners as an alternative source of funding.
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Conclusion

- I would like to reiterate that with its prime geographical position, Myanmar will continue to participate in the regional integration process actively to fulfill the objectives of our cooperation, and to meet the aspirations of the people of the BIMSTEC.
- I thank you.

Annex VI

**Opening and welcome Statement by Hon'ble Mr. Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal at the Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting
Kathmandu, Nepal on 29 August 2018**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Namaste and good morning!

I am pleased to welcome all of you to this Ministerial Meeting.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to Your Excellencies, the Honorable Foreign/External Affairs Ministers of the BIMSTEC Member States, for accepting our invitation to attend this Meeting.

I wish you all a very pleasant stay in Kathmandu.

This meeting precedes the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit which will commence tomorrow. Therefore, today's deliberations and decisions will be of vital importance for the success of the Fourth Summit and also for further strengthening of cooperation under the BIMSTEC process.

Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

BIMSTEC that connects South Asia with SouthEast Asia-two vibrant growth poles- is a unique regional platform. Our region shares history, geographical contiguity, great civilizations and has huge potentials. Bestowed with natural and human resources, we can collectively contribute to realizing a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Bay of Bengal region.

Moreover, the recent global economic outlook points to a bright sky with emerging Asia having strong growth prospect. BIMSTEC countries individually remain at the forefront of the economic dynamism. Collective regional economic framework certainly enables BIMSTEC to perform better on economic front.

However, we are still grappling with numerous economic, social and environmental problems. The challenges of poverty, hunger, backwardness, inequality, natural disasters, environmental degradation, terrorism, organized crimes, illicit drugs and human trafficking; to name a few are daunting. This is a sad predicament and ignominy for us.

BIMSTEC has completed two decades of journey. Though we have made some progress, it has not matched the potentials. So, it is a time for retrospection and serious analysis.

This is the time to address this precarious situation in a determined manner. This is the time to do away with business-as-usual approach. We must pursue our goals with renewed vigor in a focused and time-bound manner. We must display our quick, collective and firm response to our collective problems. What is required is sincere pursuit of concerted efforts with the common understanding that deeper integration results in a win-win outcome for all of us.

If we are to achieve regional growth and prosperity, there is a need to deepen rather than broaden and proliferate areas of cooperation under BIMSTEC. Tangible results ensure credibility of our enterprise. Therefore, rationalizing the priority areas and concentrating on core economic areas such as connectivity, trade, tourism, energy, and agriculture is imperative.

Connectivity is the enabler; energy is the locomotive; technology is the accelerator; investment and trade is the driver of regional growth and prosperity for bringing about structural as well as socio-economic transformation in the region. These transformative factors of regional growth and prosperity should top the BIMSTEC agenda from now onwards. They can be the game changer in our march to shared prosperity.

Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

Poverty remains a great challenge in our region. Poverty in one part of the region is a threat to prosperity everywhere in the region. We must eradicate it through the effective and timely implementation of the BIMSTEC Poverty Plan of Action in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As the lead country, Nepal remains committed towards this end.

Our region is one of the least integrated regions of the world in trade and physical connectivity despite the fact that not very long ago, the Bay of Bengal used to be a centre for global maritime trade, and a hub of commercial and cultural exchange. The Bay of Bengal was a linchpin between various cultures, societies and civilizations.

Therefore, BIMSTEC should focus on re-vitalizing those links from the past, and on enabling the drivers of integration among the Member States. Negotiations on BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement are yet to be concluded. Early conclusion and operationalization of all trade related instruments is critical for enhancing economic engagements in the region.

We must ensure a competitive incentive structure for our private sector to encourage them to trade and invest in the region. We must make the cost of non-trading in BIMSTEC higher. In this context, BIMSTEC economic and business forums should work together to this end.

It is a matter of satisfaction that a master-plan on transport connectivity is being developed to expand and upgrade connectivity in the region. Initiatives for grid interconnections will also

be taken forward after signing of its MoU in this Summit in order to enhance region-wide energy cooperation. Energy trade must be placed in the agenda for further cooperation.

The Bay of Bengal region is vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters. We suffer disproportionately from the adverse impact of climate change. Ecological interdependence of our region from high mountains to deep seas calls for strong collaborative partnership amongst us.

Peace and stability is very important for development. Our region is not free from menace of terrorism and other transnational organized crimes. We have to work together to defeat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and combat other transnational crimes.

Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

We have to move from commitment to implementation phase. We must make BIMSTEC mechanisms functional and result-oriented. Secretariat must be strengthened with adequate resources.

Moving forward, I wish to touch upon three important areas for our consideration.

First, growth and prosperity require tangible progress in trade integration, particularly early progress in the reduction of non-tariff barriers; streamlining regulatory frameworks and harmonization of standards. Trade and transit facilitations must be given top priority. TNC negotiations on all trade-related instruments must be concluded at the earliest.

Second, transport, energy and ICT connectivity must receive our top priority. We must work together closely to promote sustainable transport networks, sustainable energy and power grid interconnections, and information highways.

Last, we must address shared vulnerabilities and risks posed by natural disasters, food security and climate change. Resilient and innovative BIMSTEC is absolutely critical to sustaining momentum of growth dynamics, taking into account special circumstances and needs of LDCs and LLDCs.

For making progress in these areas, what we need is an enhanced level of political will. After all, a regional organization can flourish only with the stronger commitment of its Member States.

Nepal attaches great importance to regional cooperation under BIMSTEC. It is one of our foreign policy priorities.

I look forward to having a constructive and productive discussion today.

Please allow me to express my appreciation to our colleagues for their hard work both in the Special and Nineteenth Sessions of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting.

I would also like to commend His Excellency Mr. M. Shahidul Islam, Secretary-General of BIMSTEC and his team for their utmost efforts for preparatory works of this Meeting.

With these words, I conclude my opening remarks.

Thank you.

Annex VII

**Statement by
Hon Vasantha Senanayake, MP
State Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka at the
16th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting
29 August 2018, Kathmandu**

Your Excellency, Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, Foreign Minister of Nepal & Chair of the BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Foreign Minister and the Government of Nepal for the warm welcome and gracious hospitality extended to me and my delegation since our arrival in the Himalayan city of Kathmandu. I also wish to congratulate our host nation on the excellent arrangements made to ensure that this Ministerial Meeting and Summit is a resounding success.

Permit me, to felicitate you Mr Chairman for efficiently guiding BIMSTEC since assuming the Chair. I am confident, that under your able guidance we will have a fruitful meeting. I also wish to appreciate the work of the Senior Officials for drafting an ambitious declaration, which Sri Lanka, as the next Chair looks forward to operationalise.

I am pleased to acknowledge that BIMSTEC has made significant strides in increasing cooperation among nations in the Bay of Bengal region. The key characteristic of our Organization has been the existing together of the 'Look West' policy of the ASEAN nations and the 'Look East' policy of their South Asian counterparts, thereby bridging two of the most dynamic regions in the world. I see a considerable number of complementarities in our economies and numerous opportunities for cooperation.

We are gathered here today, since we as a group recognize the potential of such cooperation. Our collective efforts and continuing engagement clearly demonstrate the commitment towards achieving the common goals that we adopted in the 1997 Bangkok declaration.

Despite achieving economic growth, poverty and growing inequality continue to plague our region, hence reinforcing the need to intensify our efforts to address the needs of our people in a sustainable manner. Currently, BIMSTEC member states account for 21% of the world's population, have a collective GDP of USD 2.85 trillion and an average economic growth rate of 6.5%. We in this region are blessed with oceans as well as mountainous ecosystems which are yet to be fully utilised for improving livelihoods and economic growth. It is our responsibility to outline sustainable utilisation of our resources to ensure benefits for future generations.

BIMSTEC also has the potential to be an influential trading bloc, given its vast natural and human resources. In order to fulfil its economic potential, we should endeavour to finalise the proposed BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Sri Lanka remains fully committed to this process of the Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC)

As the lead country in the technology sector since the inception of BIMSTEC, I welcome the efforts to finalise the MOA on the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility to be set up in Colombo. This would facilitate technology collaborations and partnerships to benefit small and medium enterprises.

As we look towards the next decade of BIMSTEC it is important to assess our progress in the identified pillars of cooperation. It is important to undertake a review towards rationalising these pillars of cooperation towards a more objective and results oriented BIMSTEC. As much as we recognise the importance of being a catalyst in the region, we also recognise the vast potential of BIMSTEC to provide impetus to achieving results, by accelerating progress in the core areas of cooperation. We welcome the concept paper by Thailand in this regard.

All BIMSTEC Member States have vibrant and thriving business communities. We should encourage interaction between our respective business leaders and captains of industry to galvanise some of our ideas into action. We all agree that the private sector is the engine of growth in our respective countries, increased interaction between them, sector wise and through business chambers, would provide further impetus to our economic engagement and enhance the visibility and stature of our organisation.

The Bay of Bengal region has natural gas reserves and the potential to generate hydropower. Energy generation and distribution are potentially important areas of collaboration for BIMSTEC countries.

The Indian Ocean is a large resource that requires cooperation among BIMSTEC states; BIMSTEC should promote maritime safety and security, create links with organisations like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) for complementary action, and promote the Blue Economy. There are both traditional and non-traditional security threats in the Bay of Bengal.

BIMSTEC should work to establish a rules-based system, guaranteeing freedom of navigation for maritime commerce and addressing maritime security threats by non-state actors, such as pirates and illegal fisherman.

The Tourism sector makes a remarkable contribution to the economies of our region. This industry provides vast direct and indirect employment opportunities for our people. Sri Lanka is pleased to have made considerable progress in this sector in the past years and looks forward to promoting Buddhist circuit tourism together with BIMSTEC Member States.

Sri Lanka looks forward to assuming the Chairmanship of BIMSTEC at the conclusion of the 4th Summit and seeks your fullest cooperation to achieve the ambitious goals we have set for ourselves in the coming years.

Thank you.

Annex VIII

**Statement by
H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand
At the 16th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting,
28 August 2018, Kathmandu, Nepal**

**Excellencies,
Honourable Participants,**

It is my great pleasure and honour to participate in the 16th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting in this charming capital of Kathmandu. At the outset, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Government of Nepal for all arrangements made to host this Meeting and tomorrow's fourth BIMTECS Summit.

Today's meeting provides us with a good opportunity to reflect on BIMSTEC's past achievements and ways to drive our cooperation forward to promote peace, stability, prosperity and sustainability in our region.

BIMSTEC has gone through thick and thin of the development process. It has been blessed with abundant natural resources, efficient workforce, the majority of which are in their prime working age, and a vast market of over 1.6 billion people with a combined GDP of \$2.8 trillion and an impressive average annual growth of 6 per cent, making it one of the fastest growing sub-regions in the world. BIMSTEC cooperation has also matured and flourished from trade and investment promotion and people-to-people contact to the present 14 areas of cooperation.

Despite these progresses which have strengthened our economies and brought our peoples closer together, we see the need to address certain challenges in our sub-region such as certain barriers to trade and investment, limited political commitment, slower than expected implementation of projects and lack of financing. Indeed, until recently, BIMSTEC was a low-profile economic bloc, both within the region and beyond. In addition, BIMSTEC is also facing new emerging global challenges such as trade protectionism, anti-globalization trends, rapid urbanization, and climate change.

Therefore, it is high time to revitalize and rebrand BIMSTEC to be able to address the challenges and take advantage of the new opportunities arising from the shift of the global economic epicenter towards Indo-Pacific and the rapid transformations taking place in the region, taking into account BIMSTEC's strategic location enabling it to act as a land bridge linking South Asia and Southeast Asia. On this note, I am pleased to learn from my senior officer that the SOMS have closely coordinated, made necessary compromises and worked tirelessly to make this Summit a great success. A success driven by change to make

BIMSTEC more modern, dynamic and attractive. I commend them and particularly the Secretary-General for a job well done.

We, the Ministers, should therefore build on their efforts to make BIMSTEC more tangible, effective and result-oriented to truly achieve a prosperous and sustainable community of the Bay of Bengal.

**Excellencies,
Honourable Participants,**

I would like to take this opportunity to offer my comments as follows;

First, Thailand sees the need to streamline BIMSTEC's structure of cooperation to make it more efficient and responsive to the emerging challenges and opportunities. In this regard, Thailand has recently submitted a concept paper to the BIMSTEC Secretariat proposing reprioritizing the existing 14 areas of cooperation into 5 prioritized pillars; namely Connectivity, Trade and Investment, People-to-People Contact, Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime/Security and Science and Technology. We are pleased that our Concept Paper has been well received and has been used as a working document by the Member Countries.

Second, connectivity should be given priority, as we consider it as a key to achieving the integration into global supply and value chain, and sustainable development in our countries and the sub-region. Over the years, the Royal Thai government has implemented various policies to enhance multidimensional connectivity, among others, Thailand 4.0, the development of the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) bordering our neighbours. At the sub-regional level, Thailand recently initiated the ACMECS Master Plan (2019-2023) which was adopted at the 8th ACMECS Summit in June this year in Bangkok. The Master Plan will be used to guide ACMECS towards becoming a seamless, synchronized, smart and sustainable Mekong Community. It will also complement other sub-regional, regional and global initiatives including Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, BIMSTEC Master Plan on Transport Connectivity, as well as and the 2030 United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

With a view to achieving similar objectives in BIMSTEC, Thailand has proposed a BIMSTEC Master Plan on Connectivity. I am pleased that the Asian Development Bank has made good progress in drafting the Master Plan. While we are waiting for the Master Plan to be implemented, we should make our utmost effort to conclude the negotiation of the BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement and the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement, as well as to expedite the completion of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway with the view to promoting land and maritime transport linkages in our sub-region. Tomorrow, my Prime Minister will seek your countries' support to jointly set and announce target dates for which these connectivity initiatives are to be fully operational. It is Thailand's hope that its

concurrence could be reached at the Leaders' level so that we will be equipped with enough political will to follow through at each country's national level.

Third, to deepen and broaden our trade and investment cooperation, physical connectivity should not be only our primary focus. We should also make effort to strengthen software connectivity encompassing the synchronization of rules and regulations to facilitate the movement of goods, investment, services and people within our sub-region. In this connection, we should aim for an early conclusion of the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area (FTA) agreements and other related agreements. Let us not forget that 21 years ago, the principal goal and purpose of the Leaders who conceived BIMSTEC was to establish a BIMSTEC Free Trade Area. Therefore, it is my hope that the FTA and its related agreements could be concluded within 3 – 4 years time.

Fourth, in order to increase BIMSTEC's visibility, we should engage in effective public diplomacy to create awareness in the member countries and to reach out to the people in the sub-region and beyond. We must strengthen our coordination for BIMSTEC to gain "strengths from within" from closer economic integration, mutual respect and understanding through enhanced partnership, stronger commitment, as well as closer people-to-people contact. We should aim for BIMSTEC to be recognized as a potential economic platform driving regional and global economy and playing a responsible and constructive role in the international economy, especially in the area of sustainable development with "people" at the heart.

Lastly, to become more efficient and effective, BIMSTEC organization needs to be rule-based with clear rules of procedure to guide its work in a well-coordinated manner. In this connection, Thailand supports the BIMSTEC Secretariat's proposal to draft a charter for BIMSTEC. Apart from defining a long-term vision and priorities for cooperation, the charter should promote the principle of openness and inclusiveness. Given that Thailand has experience in drafting the ASEAN Charter, we are more than pleased to share our experience with member countries. However, I wish to reiterate that our Charter should be unique and reflective of BIMSTEC identity and it can only be materialize through the contributions and will of all seven member states.

Moreover, and with a view to further strengthening BIMSTEC, we fully support the establishment of a BIMSTEC Development Fund (BDF). However, for the effective operation and the sustainability of this Fund, engagement with the private sector through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and external partners should be encouraged. This would lead to a sound financing mechanism which is crucial for concrete implementation of BIMSTEC activities and projects.

**Excellencies,
Honourable Participants,**

I am certain that our gathering today and the upcoming Summit will elevate our BIMSTEC cooperation to a higher plane. I would like to reassure you of Thailand's commitment to work closely with member countries towards enhanced partnership and cooperation in fostering peace, prosperity and sustainability in our sub-region.

Once again, I would like to thank Nepal for hosting this Meeting. I also appreciate the valuable views and suggestions from the colleagues present here. I am confident that with our strong commitment, political-will and partnership based on the inclusive approach and well-coordinated policies, we will transform BIMSTEC into a new emerging economy and an engine of growth for the benefit and the well-being of our peoples and the international community as a whole.

Thank you.

Annex IX

**Remarks by the Secretary General of BIMSTEC
at the Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting
Kathmandu, Nepal on 29 Aug 2018**

01. **Hon'ble Pradeep Kumar Gyawali**, Minister for Foreign Affairs
Government of Nepal & the Chair of the 16th Ministerial Meeting
02. **His Excellency Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, MP**
Foreign Minister, Government of Bangladesh
03. **His Excellency Ambassador Sonam Tshong**
Foreign Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan
04. **His Excellency Gen. (Dr.) V.K. Singh**
Minister of State for External Affairs, Government of India
05. **His Excellency Mr. Kyaw Tin**
Union Minister for International Cooperation, Government of Myanmar
06. **His Excellency Mr. Vasantha Senanayake**
State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka
07. **His Excellency Mr. Don Pramudwinai**
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, Royal Thai Government

01. It is a great honour for me to address the 16th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, a body that approved my appointment as the Secretary General of BIMSTEC one year ago. I am humbled by the honor associated with heading the Secretariat of a unique organization that brings together seven Member States from South and South East Asia bound by the common objective of promoting peace, prosperity and sustainable development in the Bay of Bengal region.

02. The 16th Ministerial Meeting is taking place at a time when BIMSTEC has come of age as a regional organization. Over the last twenty years, BIMSTEC has made 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 among Member States to promote regional cooperation in the Bay of Bengal region.

03. The Third BIMSTEC Summit held in 2014 in Nay Pyi Taw, 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 (a) BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat in Bangladesh; (b) BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO) in Bhutan; and (c) BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate (BCWC) in India. The permanent Secretariat of BIMSTEC became operational in Dhaka, Bangladesh following its formal inauguration on 13 September 2014 by Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh. The BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate (BCWC), located in Noida, India has been providing its services to BIMSTEC Member States through a web-portal. Efforts are being made to operationalize BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO) in Bhutan and BIMSTEC Energy Centre (BEC) in India. In addition, the establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility (TTF) in Sri Lanka is under process.

04. A notable achievement of BIMSTEC's norm-setting role was the signing of the Framework Agreement on BIMSTEC Free Trade Area in 2004. The Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) has held 20 rounds of negotiation to operationalize BIMSTEC FTA. After a gap of three years, Bangladesh as the Lead Country for Trade and Investment sector, is taking fresh initiative to resume FTA negotiations. 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.

05. BIMSTEC process received strong impetus at the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat held in Goa, India in October 2016, when the Leaders expressed their resolve to make the organization stronger, more effective and result-oriented. In addition to the Goa Outcome Document, the Leaders agreed on a 16-point Agenda of Action, which set forth a result-oriented work plan aiming at completing the pending agreements and moving ahead with new initiatives. In pursuance of 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 Assistance in criminal Matters. Above all, the MOU for Establishing BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection is ready for signature during the 4th BIMSTEC Summit.

06. Our Leaders have repeatedly emphasized the importance of connectivity as the prime mover of regional integration process. The ADB-assisted BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study (BTILS) completed in 2014 is the first major initiative taken by the Member States to enhance transport connectivity. Most of the Member States have taken initiatives towards implementation of projects identified by BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and

Logistics Study (BTILS). In pursuance of the directives of the Agenda of Action, 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.

07. BIMSTEC has become a useful platform to facilitate regular exchanges among the Governments of Member States, thereby narrowing down differences and creating common grounds for cooperation in diverse areas ranging from trade and investment to counter terrorism and transnational crime. 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 held its first meeting in March 2017 in New Delhi, the second meeting in March 2018 in Dhaka and is scheduled to hold its third meeting in Thailand in March 2019. There are many directives in the draft Declaration of the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit which will further streamline institutional structure, working methods and areas of cooperation of BIMSTEC.

08. The BIMSTEC Secretariat is fully functional in a dedicated premise provided by the Government of Bangladesh. I would like to record our deep appreciation to the Government of Bangladesh, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for providing full support to the Secretariat in its functioning. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Mr. Sumith Nakandala, the First Secretary General of BIMSTEC, who worked hard to lay down the basic norms and structures of the Secretariat.

09. Mr. Chairman: I would be remiss in my duties if I did not mention about Nepal's strong leadership to BIMSTEC process during the last four years, a process that would see its culmination through the holding of a very successful of Summit and the adoption of Kathmandu Declaration. I would like to assure you, Mr. Chairman, that the Secretariat will do everything to support Member States in implementing the Summit Decisions.

Thank you.



**BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL
TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION**



Draft of the FOURTH BIMSTEC SUMMIT DECLARATION¹

30-31 August 2018

Kathmandu, Nepal

“Towards a Peaceful, Prosperous and Sustainable Bay of Bengal Region”

We, the Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, the Chief Advisor of the Kingdom of Bhutan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Prime Minister of Nepal, the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, and the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, met in Kathmandu on 30-31 August 2018 for the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit; and

Reaffirming the firm commitment to the principles and purposes of BIMSTEC as enshrined in the 1997 Bangkok Declaration;

Recalling the Third BIMSTEC Summit Declaration (Nay Pyi Taw, 4 March 2014) and the BIMSTEC Leaders’ Retreat Outcome Document (Goa, 16 October 2016);

Affirming the solemn commitment to making the Bay of Bengal Region peaceful, prosperous and sustainable by building on our common strengths through our collective efforts;

Being convinced that geographical contiguity, abundant natural and human resources, rich historical linkages and cultural heritage present great potentials for promoting deeper cooperation in identified core areas in the region;

Recognizing that eradication of poverty is the greatest regional challenge in realization of development objectives and expressing firm commitment to working together for the implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development;

Acknowledging that enhanced inter-linkages and inter-dependence within the economies and societies in the BIMSTEC Member States provide greater opportunity to advance regional cooperation;

¹The Sixteenth BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 29 August 2018 endorsed the draft text of the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit Declaration, and recommended it to the Leaders for approval.

Underlining the importance of multidimensional connectivity, which promotes synergy among connectivity frameworks in our region, as a key enabler to economic integration for shared prosperity;

Taking into consideration the importance of trade and investment as one of the major contributing factors for fostering economic and social development in the region.

Recognizing the special needs and circumstances of the least developed and land-locked developing countries in the region and underlining the necessity to provide meaningful support to their development process;

Recognizing that terrorism and transnational organized crimes continue to pose a great threat to international peace and security including in the BIMSTEC countries and stressing that combating terrorism and transnational organized crimes require sustained efforts and cooperation and comprehensive approach involving active participation and collaboration of the Member States;

Reaffirming strong commitment to making BIMSTEC a dynamic, effective and result-oriented regional organization for promoting a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Bay of Bengal Region through meaningful cooperation and deeper integration;

Stressing the need for a fair, just, rule-based, equitable and transparent international order and reaffirming faith in the multilateralism with the United Nations at the centre and the rule-based international trading system;

Underscoring the importance of robust institutional arrangements to effectively steering the process of regional cooperation under BIMSTEC;

Taking Note of the participation and concurrence by the Chief Advisor of the Interim Government of Bhutan to the Summit decisions and its outcome documents on an ad referendum basis, as these are subject to endorsement by the next elected government;

Do hereby:

1. *Recall* the principles enshrined in the 1997 Bangkok Declaration and reemphasize that cooperation within BIMSTEC will be based on respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit.
2. *Agree* to intensify our efforts to realize the objectives and purposes of BIMSTEC as embodied in the 1997 Bangkok Declaration, and reiterate our pledge to work collectively towards making BIMSTEC a stronger, more effective and result-oriented organization for achieving a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Bay of Bengal Region.

3. *Resolve* to achieve, leveraging on BIMSTEC's unique position as a bridge linking South and Southeast Asia, an enhanced level of economic and social development in the region, and remain fully committed to consolidate and deepen cooperation among Member States towards transforming our organization into an effective platform to promote peace, prosperity and sustainability.
4. *Deplore* terrorist attacks in all parts of the world including in BIMSTEC countries and strongly condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations wherever and by whomsoever committed and stress that there can be no justification whatsoever for any act of terrorism. *Affirm* that the fight against terrorism should target not only terrorists, terror organizations and networks but also identify and hold accountable States and non-State entities that encourage, support or finance terrorism, provide sanctuaries to terrorists and terror groups and falsely extol their virtues. *Reiterate* our strong commitment to combat terrorism and call upon all countries to devise a comprehensive approach in this regard which should include preventing financing of terrorists and terrorist actions from territories under their control, blocking recruitment and cross-border movement of terrorists, countering radicalization, countering misuse of internet for purposes of terrorism and dismantling terrorist safe havens.
5. Repose our faith unequivocally in the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and strive to strengthen the multilateral system by reforming its rules, institutions and instruments to make it relevant to contemporary global challenges and agree to work together to present a collective voice to safeguard our collective interests for a fair, just, rule-based, equitable and transparent world order.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

6. *Decide* to task the BIMSTEC Secretariat to prepare a preliminary draft of the charter for the organization, building on the 1997 Bangkok Declaration, defining a long-term vision and priorities for cooperation, clearly delineating roles and responsibilities of different layers of institutional structure and decision-making processes, for consideration by the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPWC) and other higher bodies with a view to adopting it by the Fifth Summit; and agree to task the BPWC to develop the Rules of Procedure (RoP) for the BIMSTEC Mechanisms.
7. *Decide* to establish a BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee 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.
8. *Direct* the relevant Ministries/national agencies of our respective governments to explore the possibility of establishing a BIMSTEC Development Fund (BDF), at an appropriate time, with voluntary contributions from the Member States, which will be utilized for research and planning of BIMSTEC and financing of projects, programmes and other activities of BIMSTEC Centers and Entities as agreed upon by the Member States.

9. *Agree* to enhance the institutional capacity of the BIMSTEC Secretariat, including through financial and human resources, in order to enable it to coordinate, monitor and facilitate implementation of BIMSTEC activities and programmes; and initiate project proposals as agreed by the Member States as well as fulfil any other responsibility entrusted to it in an effective and efficient manner and agree to raise the numbers of Directors to seven, one from each Member State, in a staggered manner.
10. *Acknowledge* the importance of enhancing the visibility and stature of BIMSTEC in international fora by, *inter alia*, forging common positions, as appropriate, on issues of common interest and seeking group recognition in various multilateral organizations, institutions and processes.
11. *Emphasize* the need to accelerate progress in the core areas of cooperation and to *review*, restructure and rationalize the existing areas of BIMSTEC cooperation and streamline the operational modalities for activities, implementation of programmes and projects under BIMSTEC for bringing out tangible results. Welcome Thailand's concept paper on the Reprioritization of BIMSTEC Pillars of Cooperation proposing to streamline to five pillars which will be subjected to further discussion in the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee.
12. *Agree* to take up on priority basis the legal documents and instruments that are pending for internal approval process for finalization and ratification.
13. *Commend* the role of Lead Countries for the progress made in the respective sectors, as annexed to this declaration, and encourage them to accelerate their efforts to make further progress.
14. *Express* our appreciation for former Secretary-General Mr. Sumith Nakandala's valuable contribution in advancing the work of BIMSTEC during his tenure and welcome the appointment of Mr. M. Shahidul Islam of Bangladesh as the Secretary General of BIMSTEC.
15. *Convey* deep appreciation to Nepal for the able stewardship of BIMSTEC from March 2014 and welcome Sri Lanka as the new Chair of BIMSTEC.
16. *Reiterate* the commitment to timely holding of Summit and other meetings of the BIMSTEC mechanisms to intensify the process of regional cooperation.
17. *Agree* to make our directives, commitments and statements of our positions on sectoral review expressed at the Annexure as part of this Declaration.
18. *Express* our sincere appreciation to the Government of Nepal for the warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements made for the Summit.

*Annex to the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit Declaration***Sectoral Review****Poverty Alleviation**

1. *Reiterate* our commitment to the eradication poverty in the Bay of Bengal Region by 2030 in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and call for effective implementation of the BIMSTEC Poverty Plan of Action and for gearing up efforts of all sectors to contribute to the over-arching goal of poverty alleviation.
2. *Express* commitment to nurturing our workforce by taking concrete measures to provide decent job opportunities for them through increased investment in service and productive sectors of national economy.

Transport and Communications (Connectivity)

3. *Reiterate* our resolve to establish seamless multi-modal transportation linkages and smooth, synchronized and simplified transit facilities through the development, expansion and modernization of highways, railways, waterways, sea routes, airways in the region and direct our respective authorities to speed up their efforts to conclude the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement and the BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement as early as possible taking into account the special circumstances and needs of the Member States.
4. *Note* with satisfaction the preparation of the draft BIMSTEC Master Plan on Transport Connectivity and call for its early adoption and thank the Asian Development Bank for providing support to prepare the Master Plan and task the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group (BTCWG) to work out the modalities for its implementation, giving due attention to the special circumstances and needs of the Member States. We agree that the Master Plan would serve as a strategic document that guides actions and promotes synergy among various connectivity frameworks, such as the ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity 2025 (MPAC 2025), the Ayeyawady - Chao Phraya- Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), to achieve enhanced connectivity and sustainable development in our region.
5. *Decide* to establish a Working Group to deal with information technology and communications related matters with a view to provide greater access, more affordable and high-speed internet and mobile communications to the peoples of the region. In this regard, we welcome the offer of the Government of India to host a BIMSTEC Ministerial Conclave at the India Mobile Congress 2018 being held in New Delhi from 25-27 October 2018 on the theme “New Digital Horizons: Connect, Create, Innovate”, and encourage all Member States to participate in it.

Trade and Investment

6. *Renew* our commitment to an early conclusion of BIMSTEC Free Trade Area (FTA) negotiations, and direct the BIMSTEC Trade and Economic Ministerial Meeting (TEMM) and its subsidiary bodies including the Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) to expedite finalization of all related Agreements of the BIMSTEC FTA as early as possible; and express our satisfaction on the progress of negotiation on the Agreement on Trade in Goods and the Agreement on Customs Cooperation and also direct our respective Ministries/Agencies to participate regularly in TNC Meetings.
7. *Agree* to revitalize the activities of BIMSTEC Business Forum and BIMSTEC Economic Forum to further strengthen Government–Private sector cooperation for the promotion of trade and investment and task the Expert Group on BIMSTEC Visa Matters to continue negotiation for finalization of the modalities for the BIMSTEC Visa Facilitation.
8. *Welcome* the offer of India to host a BIMSTEC Startup Conclave in December 2018, and encourage all Member States to participate in it.

Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime

9. *Reiterate* our position that terrorism continues to pose a serious threat to peace and stability in our region and reaffirm our strong commitment to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and agree to taking appropriate measures in this regard.
10. *Look forward* to the signing of the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters; call upon the Member States for its early ratification and express satisfaction that many Member States have ratified the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking and call upon the remaining Member State to do so.
11. *Express* our determination to strengthen cooperation and coordination among the law enforcement, intelligence and security agencies; and decide to hold meetings at the level of BIMSTEC Home Ministers and continue with the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs meetings as part of promoting cooperation and coordination on counter terrorism and transnational crimes.
12. *Welcome* the offer of Thailand to host the Third Meeting of the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs in March 2019.

Environment and Disaster Management

13. *Encourage* closer cooperation in disaster management through sharing of information, including early warning system, adoption of preventive measures, rehabilitation and capacity building and agree to build on the existing capacities in the region and decide to

establish an Inter-governmental Expert Group to develop a plan of action to improve preparedness and coordination for responding to natural disasters in the Bay of Bengal Region.

Climate Change

14. *Express* our serious concerns over environmental degradation, adverse impact of climate change and global warming on the fragile Himalayan and mountain eco-systems and their inter-linkages with the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean and resolve to strengthen cooperation to protect and preserve the environment to address, *inter alia*, the adverse impact of climate change on the lives and livelihoods of our peoples; explore the possibility to establish an Inter-governmental Expert Group to develop a plan of action for collective response to climate change for the region; reaffirm our commitments to operationalize the Paris Agreement, in accordance with principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR & RC), taking into account different national circumstances and equity.

Energy

15. *Recognize* the high potentials of energy resources in the region, particularly renewable and clean energy sources, and agree to expedite our efforts to develop a comprehensive plan for energy cooperation by working closely with each other within the region and decide to constitute an intergovernmental group of experts to enhance energy cooperation including in hydro-power and other sources of renewable energy.
16. *Remain* committed to providing uninterrupted and affordable power supply for the economic development of our peoples, including through energy trade; welcome the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection and instruct the relevant agencies to take concrete measures to initiate harmonization of technical, planning and operational standards for removing barriers to grid interconnections and also ensure early establishment of a BIMSTEC Grid and call for an early operationalization of the BIMSTEC Energy Centre in order to strengthen energy cooperation in the region.

Technology

17. *Agree* to enhance cooperation for development, access and sharing of affordable technologies – including for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises for promoting sustainable development across sectors and welcome the efforts of the Member States towards the signing of the Memorandum of Association on the Establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Sri Lanka.

18. *Also agree* to focus cooperation in human resources development and education for the advancement of technology in the region, keeping in mind the need to address the disruptive impacts of technology

Agriculture

19. *Decide* to deepen cooperation in the agricultural and allied sectors, including crops, livestock and horticulture, farm machinery and harvest management so as to increase productivity and profitability of agricultural produce in a sustainable manner; task the relevant authorities to intensify cooperation to attain food and nutritional security; and preserve and promote knowledge about traditional farming by appropriately linking both traditional and modern farming, and reducing costs, enhancing income and mitigating risks for farming communities, with the objective of facilitating agricultural trade among member countries and making contribution to the poverty alleviation, job creation, and improvement of quality of life of the masses in our nations.
20. *Welcome* the offer of Myanmar to host the 1st BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture by 2019 and the offer of India to host the BIMSTEC Seminar on Climate Smart Farming Systems in 2019.

Fisheries

21. *Stress* on continued cooperation in conservation, management and sustainable use of marine resources in the region; agree to deepen cooperation in fisheries to ensure food security and improve livelihoods of people in our region and task the relevant national agencies to explore the possibility of meaningful collaboration to promote sustainable marine fisheries and direct the relevant authorities to explore how the landlocked Member States can benefit from inland fisheries.

Public Health

22. *Agree* to expand cooperation in our efforts to address non-communicable diseases as well as trans-national public health issues that threaten the economic and social progress of the peoples of BIMSTEC region, including HIV and AIDS, malaria, dengue, tuberculosis, viral influenza-including avian and swine influenza and other emerging public health threats; note the progress in traditional medicine cooperation; remain committed to continuing the collaborative activities in this field; encourage active cooperation among concerned agencies including in the area of traditional medicine through exchange of information, sharing of experience, training of personnel and other concrete programmes to prevent and contain them; and express appreciation to Thailand for their efforts for cooperation in traditional medicine.

People-to-People Contacts

23. *Resolve* to build a deeper understanding and trust among Member States and promote people-to-people contacts at various levels; note with satisfaction the activities of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks (BNPTT) in enhancing public awareness about BIMSTEC and direct the relevant agencies to finalize the terms of reference (ToR) of BNPTT.
24. *Agree* to explore possibility of establishing appropriate BIMSTEC forums for parliamentarians, universities, academia, research institutes, cultural organizations and media community to expand the scope of people-to-people contacts.

Cultural Cooperation

25. *Emphasize* the need to enhance cultural exchange among Member States to further strengthen the historic cultural ties among our peoples; promote mutual respect and tolerance for cultural diversity; underscore the importance of Buddhism as a connecting thread in the region; and remain committed to giving a clear manifestation to this by establishing a Buddhist Circuit.
26. *Agree* to hold meetings of BIMSTEC Cultural Ministers and BIMSTEC Cultural Festival at regular intervals; welcome the offer of Bangladesh to hold the 2nd BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Culture and 1st BIMSTEC Cultural Festival; and strongly encourage our respective Cultural Ministers to participate in these two important events.

Tourism

27. *Agree* to take concrete steps to promote intra-BIMSTEC tourism; task the relevant authorities to devise strategies considering the emerging opportunities and building on the past initiatives including the “Plan of Action for Tourism Development and Promotion for the BIMSTEC Region” adopted in Kolkata in 2005 and reinforced by the 2nd BIMSTEC Tourism Ministers Round Table and Workshop in Kathmandu in 2006; agree to take concrete measures to facilitate tourism by ensuring safety and security of tourists, and smooth transport connectivity; reaffirm our commitment to developing and promoting Buddhist Tourist Circuit, Temple Tourist Circuit, ancient cities trail, eco-tourism and medical tourism; and welcome the offer of Nepal to host a BIMSTEC tourism conclave in Nepal in 2020, coinciding with the Visit Nepal Year 2020.

Mountain Economy

28. *Underscore* the necessity of making concrete efforts to ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their bio-diversity in order to support sustainable development; welcome the concept note on promoting mountain economies in BIMSTEC

countries developed by Nepal to promote cooperation in this area; and decide to establish an Inter-governmental Expert Group to develop an action plan.

Blue Economy

29. *Emphasize* the importance of blue economy and agree to cooperate in this sector for the sustainable development in the region and decide to establish an Inter-governmental Expert Group to develop an action plan on blue economy, keeping in mind the special needs and circumstances of the landlocked Member States.

30. *Note* with satisfaction the hosting of International Blue Economy Conference in Bangladesh in 2017 with participation of government representatives from BIMSTEC Member States.
