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# **5<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit**

**Statement**

**by**

**H E Sheikh Hasina**

**Hon'ble Prime Minister**

**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**

**Colombo, Sri Lanka**

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## **Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim**

His Excellency Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the Hon'ble President of Sri Lanka and the Chairman of the 5th BIMSTEC Summit,  
Heads of Governments and Heads of Delegations from the Member States,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Secretary General of BIMSTEC,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu Alaikum, Aiyu Buyan and a Very Good Morning to you all.

I am very happy to be present virtually at the 5th BIMSTEC Summit today. I convey my warm greetings to His Excellency Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka and the Chairman of the 5th BIMSTEC Summit.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Government of Sri Lanka for carrying forward the BIMSTEC process since the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit. I appreciate the theme of the 5<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit: “BIMSTEC- Towards a Resilient Region, Prosperous Economies and Healthy Peoples”.

I also thank the BIMSTEC Secretary General Ambassador Tenzin Lekphell for his role in coordinating our work.

### **Mr. Chairman,**

The 5<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit is taking place at a time when the world is going through a turmoil due to Russia-Ukraine war and its aftermath. The world has just started recovering from the devastated impacts of COVID-19 pandemic that battered many economies across the world. At this critical juncture, the war has pushed the world towards a fresh debacle impacting fuel and food supplies, and soaring the prices of essentials. The livelihoods of people, especially of countries like us, have started becoming tougher with the price hike of essentials.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In Bangladesh, we just celebrated our 51st anniversary of Independence on 26th March. We also celebrated two special events during the last two years; the extended ceremonies of the Birth Centenary of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Golden Jubilee of our Independence.

I fondly recollect the graceful presence in those events of some of your Excellencies despite the threats of COVID-19 pandemic.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Bangladesh had been committed to Regional Cooperation since our Independence. The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman first dreamt of Regional Cooperation through working with neighbours in South Asia. Bangladesh's joining of BIMSTEC forum as a founding member in 1997 was an extension of the legacy of the Father of the Nation's dream. Today, personally I feel privileged as the only founding leader present on the eve of the Silver Jubilee of our organization. The spirit of Regional Cooperation set by our Father of the Nation is now a part of our Foreign Policy priorities. Hosting of the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka is a testimony of our commitment to the organization.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Bangladesh underwent a phenomenal transformation in socio-economic fronts during the last one decade while upholding democratic polity. The rate of poverty was reduced from 41.5% to 20.5% and extreme poverty from 25.1% to 10.5% during this period. Per capita income more than tripled to USD 2,591. The infant mortality rate was reduced to 23.67 per 1,000; maternal mortality rate to 173 per 100 thousand live births; and longevity of life rose to 73 years.

Bangladesh is one of the top five fastest growing economies in the world. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, we maintained a 6.3% growth last year. Just last week, we brought 100 percent population under electricity coverage. The UNGA has granted us the final approval of graduation from the status of LDCs.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The 7-nation BIMSTEC is collectively a big entity with hosting over 1.54 billion people that is more than one-fifth of world population. This huge population is a not only a challenge but also an opportunity.

The BIMSTEC Forum is an appropriate tool we can leverage for our mutual benefits to address post COVID-19 challenges as well as the impacts of political crisis in the West.

The 5<sup>th</sup> BISMTEC Summit gives us an opportunity to expedite our collective efforts and find out common solutions to these multiple challenges. We need to find common strategies to rebuild a sustainable and resilient Bay of Bengal Region by tapping the full potentials of the region.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Bangladesh is the lead country for Trade and Investment within BIMSTEC. I urge upon the leaders to extend support to implement BIMSTEC Framework Agreement on Free Trade Area (FTA) signed in 2004 for operation of tariff free trade among the member states. Conclusion of some essential constituent legal instruments of the FTA is required. Some progresses have been made in finalizing the Agreement on Trade in Goods and Rules of Origin, by the relevant sectoral working group led by Bangladesh. I seek support from the distinguished leaders to expedite the process.

Multimodal Transport Connectivity is another vital component of BIMSTEC Cooperation. We are committed to linking Bangladesh with the countries in the Bay of Bengal Region. I am happily joining BIMSTEC leaders today to adopt the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Master Plan formulated by the Member States with technical assistance of the Asian Development Bank. I strongly believe the Master Plan will facilitate regional integration in the Bay of Bengal Region.

**Excellencies**

Cooperation in Energy sector is a very vital component for our development and survival. We have to take new and collective initiatives for innovation and renewable energy.

I am happy that our countries signed the Agreement on Power Grid Connection among BIMSTEC Member States during the last Summit in 2018. We have to work together to make the agreement operational. To expedite the process, we may welcome proposed technical assistance programme with ADB on developing BIMSTEC Master Plan on Power Grid Connectivity.

We reiterate our commitment to maintain security and stability in our region within the framework of BIMSTEC Cooperation and Security Mechanism. We are working and taking part in all activities and events under the BIMSTEC Convention on Counter Terrorism and Convectional Crimes (CTTC). We have been taking part in regular security consultations under the framework of BIMSTEC National Security Advisors Forum.

### **Excellencies,**

Permanent Secretariat and the Secretary General play vital role in promoting regional cooperation through their coordination and facilitation. As the host country, we are committed to doing everything needed to strengthen the infrastructure. I approved the construction of a new modern iconic building at the present premises of the Secretariat for its smooth functioning and proper representation. I thank the Secretary General and his team for upholding the spirit of BIMSTEC Cooperation through their relentless efforts.

I am happy that BIMSTEC is getting a Charter on its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Following our directions at the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit, our governments negotiated and finalized an agreed text of the proposed Charter which we are going to adopt and sign today. We will also witness the signing of three more mutual legal instruments.

### **Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Heads of States and Heads of Governments, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On the eve of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the BIMSTEC Forum, I earnestly urge upon the distinguished leaders to join hands together in reiterating our collective commitments today, to revitalize the Organization with a view to making the process fully functional by activating all 14 sectors of cooperation. Let us pledge ourselves for:

- a) Immediate implementation and operationalization of all agreed decisions like BIMSTEC FTA, BIMSTEC Centers and entities like Disaster Management Center, Energy Center, Cultural Commission etc., Connectivity Projects, Energy Grid Connectivity with a view to bringing immediate tangible benefits for our peoples.

- b) Completion of the process of all other legal instruments and policy documents that are already underway but not yet finalized by pushing the organization's momentum on a fast track.
- c) Empowering the organization to engage in creative and innovative process by expanding its partnership and outreach with relevant entities outside of BIMSTEC with a view to addressing emerging threats and seizing new opportunities.

I wish the 5<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC all success.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu  
May Bangladesh Live Forever.  
Long Live the Spirit of BIMSTEC.