

Remarks of Hon'ble Prime Minister of India
Fifth BIMSTEC Summit
30 March 2022, Sri Lanka

**His Excellency, President of Sri Lanka,
My friends from BIMSTEC member countries and fellow leaders,
Secretary General of BIMSTEC**

Namaskar!

Today, I am very happy to meet you all in the 5th BIMSTEC Summit. This is the 25th year of the establishment of BIMSTEC, so I consider today's summit to be especially important. The results of this landmark Summit will write a golden chapter in the history of BIMSTEC.

Excellencies,

President Rajapaksa has provided efficient leadership to BIMSTEC in the challenging environment of the last two years. First of all, I would like to congratulate him. Our region has not remained untouched by today's challenging global scenario. Our economies, our people are still facing the ill effects of COVID-19 Pandemic.

Developments in Europe in the last few weeks have raised a question mark on the stability of the international order. In this context, it has become important to make BIMSTEC regional cooperation more active. It has also become imperative to give more priority to our regional security.

Excellencies,

Today, our BIMSTEC Charter is being adopted. This is an important step in our efforts towards creating an institutional architecture. I thank the Chairman for this. In the Charter, we have decided to hold summit meetings every 2 years and Foreign Ministers' meeting every year. I welcome this decision. Now we should focus on how to strengthen this architecture even further.

In this context, the Secretary General has suggested that an Eminent Persons Group be constituted to prepare a vision document. I agree with the suggestion. In order for BIMSTEC to meet our expectations, it is also important to increase the capacity of the Secretariat. My suggestion is that Secretary General may prepare a road map for the achievement of this goal. For this important work to be

completed on time and as per expectations, India will provide financial assistance of one million dollars to increase the operational budget of the Secretariat.

Excellencies,

To enhance our mutual trade, it is necessary to make speedy progress on the proposal of BIMSTEC FTA. We should enhance exchanges between the entrepreneurs and startups of our countries. At the same time, we should also try to adopt international norms in the field of Trade Facilitation. This will help in promoting intra-BIMSTEC trade and economic integration. In this context, the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations is going to start a program with ADB to increase the awareness of our officials. I hope that the concerned officials of all countries will participate regularly in this program.

Excellencies,

The mainstay of better integration, better trade, and better people-to-people relations between us is better connectivity. However much emphasis we give to it is less. Today we have adopted BIMSTEC's Master Plan for Transport Connectivity; I would like to thank ADB for preparing it. We should emphasize on the early implementation of this master plan.

Simultaneously, we also have to move forward on the already ongoing initiatives in the field of connectivity. To set up a 'Coastal Shipping Eco-system' in Bay of Bengal, a legal framework should be developed soon. The time has come to take electricity grid interconnectivity beyond the discussions and take it to the implementation stage. Similarly, establishing legal framework for increasing road connectivity is also important.

Excellencies,

Our region has always been prone to natural disasters. The BIMSTEC Center for Weather and Climate is an important organization for cooperation on disaster management, especially on disaster risk reduction, and I would like your cooperation to make this more active. India is ready to contribute three million dollars to restart the work of this Centre again.

India had recently conducted the 3rd BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise, "Panex 21". Such exercises should be done regularly so that the institutional system among our officers to work together in times of disaster is strengthened.

Excellencies,

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals related to quality education is an important part of our national policies. We are working towards expanding the scope of the BIMSTEC Scholarship Scheme offered by Nalanda International University. Keeping in view the Bay of Bengal, we are also trying to promote joint research on Marine Sciences. Agriculture sector is the basis of economy of all BIMSTEC countries. We have good potential to create regional value chains of value-added agricultural products. For this we have assigned an institute of India, RIS, the task of conducting a comprehensive study.

Excellencies,

It is impossible to ensure the prosperity or development of our region without security. At our 4th Summit in Kathmandu, we decided to strengthen the regional legal framework against terrorism, trans-national crime and non-traditional threats. We also called for increased cooperation between our law enforcement agencies. I am glad that our Convention to Combat Terrorism has become active since last year. During today's summit, we are also signing Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty on Criminal Matters. We should also move fast on similar instruments so that there can be better coordination between our legal systems. Today, an agreement is being signed for cooperation between our Diplomatic Training Institutes. We can do the same agreement between our Law Enforcement Training Institutes. Forensic Science University of India is a unique and world class institution in its field. We can also arrange for capacity building unit for police and forensic officials of BIMSTEC countries in it.

Excellencies,

Today, when our region is facing the challenges of health and economic security, solidarity and cooperation between us is the need of the hour. Today is the time to make Bay of Bengal, a bridge of connectivity, a bridge of prosperity, a bridge of security. I call upon all of you to dedicate ourselves again with a renewed vigor and energy to achieve the goals for which we had decided to walk together in 1997.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, as the next Chair of BIMSTEC, I welcome Thailand and give my best wishes.

Thank you all so much!