

Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Speaks at the Inauguration Ceremony of the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka

Hon' ble Chair,
Dear Colleagues,
Secretary General of BIMSTEC, Mr. Sumith Nakandala,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu alaikum and good morning, everyone.

At the outset I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the Member States of BIMSTEC for their selecting Dhaka as the seat of BIMSTEC Secretariat.

I also welcome most warmly the representatives of the BIMSTEC Member States and other distinguished guests for joining us at this momentous occasion.

Bangladesh is a proud founding member of BIMSTEC. I fondly recall 6 June 1997, the date when BIMSTEC was established in Thailand. It was during my first term as the Prime Minister. Happily, during my third term, the BIMSTEC Secretariat is being established at Dhaka.

BIMSTEC has travelled a long way since 1997. Its membership has enlarged from four to seven and had an impressive addition of eight more sectors of cooperation to the initial six priority areas. Indeed, its achievements are commendable.

Distinguished guests,

Bangladesh attaches very high importance to regional cooperation. We are deeply committed to the objectives and goals of the organization which closely matches with our own foreign policy priorities.

BIMSTEC provides a formidable platform for developing deeper understanding and cooperation with our neighbors and work for progress and prosperity for the people of the region.

BIMSTEC represents a group of countries bound by nature and history with unique blending of commonalities and diversities. It has brought together over one- fifth of humanity under its umbrella whose combined GDP is close to 2.7 trillion US dollar.

Our shared historical and cultural linkages have naturally brought us closer. Importantly, the many common challenges that we face and the enormous opportunities that exist, provide the impetus for a stronger collaboration amongst our nation. BIMSTEC is the one which links us closely.

The establishment of BIMSTEC Secretariat is a major leap forwards regional cooperation and integration. I believe, the Secretariat will not only play its rightful role in implementing the BIMSTEC's programs and projects but also be creative in bringing new ideas and initiatives for cooperation in our region.

I congratulate Mr. Sumith Nakandala on his appointment as the first Secretary General of BIMSTEC. I am Confident that he would be able to provide the leadership in carrying out the mandates of the organization. I also assure his of our full support in his endeavors and in the effective functioning of the Secretariat.

Excellencies, ladies and gentleman,

It is true that the 14 priority areas identified for our cooperation are very important for deeper integration in the BIMSTEC region. We would like to see that progress is achieved in all these areas. However, we need to take pragmatic and realistic approach in setting our targets which achievable as well that brings in greater good for the region. I would like to share some of our thoughts in this context.

Firstly, poverty alleviation should remain an overarching goal for this organization. Our region has the largest concentration of poor in the world, despite our high economic attainments. Unless we can address the issue of poverty most comprehensively, all economic gains will be meaningless.

Secondly, a large segment of our population depends on agriculture and fisheries. Apart from ensuring food security, this sector is also the source of major employment for our peoples. A key element of our engagement should focus on intensified cooperation in this area.

Thirdly, cooperation in the area of trade and investment should remain high on our priority list. The "Framework Agreement on BIMSTEC FTA" was signed almost a decade ago, it is yet to be operational. The agreement on trade in goods is at the final stage while the agreement in services and in investment are at their initial stages and we need to work with renewed commitment for their early conclusion. It would be a significant step toward a meaningful economic integration of our region.

Fourthly, critical to our economic integration is to strengthen connectivity in the region. Improving road and railway linkages would substantially contribute to greater trade and facilitate movement of people. Bangladesh is working closely with its immediate neighbors and other friends to improve the physical connectivity bilaterally as well as sub-regionally. The Asian Development Bank deserves our appreciation for its support and contribution in the finalization of BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study. I hope that concrete projects would be undertaken soon based on the recommendations of the Study.

Fifthly, another critically important area of cooperation under BIMSTEC is energy for the sustainable development of our region. Given the huge potential for cooperation in energy sector, especially hydro-power potential in the Himalayan basin and potential hydrocarbon reserve in the Bay of Bengal, it is unacceptable that we should continue to face energy shortages. We need to work closely to enhance energy security in the region that is so essential for our economic development.

Finally, we must build strong partnership to address the challenges posed by climate change and build resilience and capabilities against natural disaster. We must also deepen our collaboration in the areas of security, tourism and technology.

ladies and gentlemen,

Today is truly a historic day for Bangladesh and for BIMSTEC. It marks the beginning of a new journey towards greater and more intense cooperation for this unique regional organization that bridges South Asia and Southeast Asia. Opening the Secretariat is the culmination of our collective resolve to create a better and more prosperous future. Let BIMSTEC Secretariat become a hallmark of proud partnership of the seven member states across the Bay of Bengal.

With this hope, I hereby, declare the “BIMSTEC Secretariat” open

I thank you.

***Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu.
May Bangladesh live forever.***