

5th BIMSTEC Summit
(Colombo, 30 March 2022)

Statement by
H.E. General Prayut Chan-o-cha (Ret.)
Prime Minister of Kingdom of Thailand

Mr. Chair,

Excellencies,

1. It is a delight to attend the Summit today. I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to the Sri Lankan Government for hosting this 5th BIMSTEC Summit amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, which perfectly reflects the harmony and collective efforts of the Member States of BIMSTEC.

2. For the past 25 years, BIMSTEC has been the key mechanism and the only sub-regional cooperation that connects Southeast Asia and South Asia together. Since the 4th BIMSTEC Summit in 2018 in Kathmandu, the global political and economic situation has become increasingly unstable. The COVID-19 pandemic, rising protectionism in the market economy, new forms of threat, energy crisis, climate change, and even international conflicts all appear to have no end in sight, impeding BIMSTEC's progress.

For this reason, BIMSTEC Summit is significant to us all, in order to reconsider our cooperation, to address the new challenges we are currently facing and to preparing for future challenges. We shall strengthen BIMSTEC by supporting its Member States in restoring the region's economy dynamically and strategically and transform the Bay of Bengal into a region of peace, stability, and prosperity with sustainable development.

3. Thailand, as a co-founder of BIMSTEC, has been an active player in this framework since the Bangkok Declaration in 1997, with the primary objective of economic cooperation. To this day, we also work with each Member State to combat poverty and promote rationalization and reorganization of BIMSTEC sectors and sub-sectors to create strategic advantages for increased effectiveness.

4. Thailand will continue to play a role as a driver and bridge-builder between Southeast Asia and South Asia in order to build on previous achievements and prepare for future opportunities and challenges. Thailand's Chairmanship of BIMSTEC this year has coincided with Thailand's APEC Chair, allowing us to steer two frameworks for sustainable development and to continue to coordinate the principles of both cooperation to ensure mutual benefits for the Pacific and Indian Oceans, in accordance with the needs and context of each cooperation.

Excellencies,

5. Today's Summit will be remembered as a historic moment in BIMSTEC's history, with all members agreeing and signing many documents. Among them is the BIMSTEC Charter, which will enable us to push our cooperation forward in a more tangible and solid manner.

6. I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who supports Thailand's vision for BIMSTEC. I believe that with each member state as Lead Country, each sector's progress will be stable, continuous, and measurable to attain the desired outcome.

7. Thailand recognizes that intra-BIMSTEC trade and investment have significant potential for growth. Connectivity is an essential for a rapid economic recovery and the development of the people-business relations that Thailand is actively pursuing. And Thailand, as the Lead Country in Connectivity, is committed to achieving these goals.

8. First, on Land Connectivity, I would like to express my gratitude to the Member States that have agreed to our proposal for the development of the BIMSTEC Master Plan on Transport Connectivity. I hope that we can support in advancing other Flagship projects under this Master Plan and ensuring that it is as effective as the Motor Vehicle Agreement.

9. Second, on Maritime Connectivity, maritime transportation is the most cost-effective mode of transportation. I would like to propose that each Member State expedites the internal procedure so that the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement can be finalized and signed. This agreement will result in the establishment of effective connections between each country's port in the Bay of Bengal.

10. Third, energy connectivity is the primary factor in the manufacturing and industrial sectors that will sustainably support BIMSTEC's development. To that end, I would like to encourage you to implement the Memorandum of Understanding for the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection, which may include the establishment of a BIMSTEC Master Plan for Energy Connectivity in the future, similar to the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transportation Connectivity.

11. Fourth, digital connectivity can be implemented through infrastructure development which supports digital technology. This will add values, reduce production cost, and minimize time consuming process.

12. Fifth, apart from the said connectivity, BIMSTEC has another advantage in terms of “people”. Our population is historically and culturally connected, which is a prerequisite for mutual trust. Thailand believes that putting "people" at the center of policymaking will result in a more balanced and sustainable policy. I believe that people-to people relations are at the core of cooperation and are essential in ensuring that BIMSTEC becomes a truly inclusive society that leaves no one behind.

Excellencies,

13. Thailand is ready to build on Sri Lanka's success, which has already laid the institutional groundwork and established the mechanism for future cooperation. I am delighted to present "Prosperous, Resilient, and Robust BIMSTEC" or PRO BIMSTEC as the concept under Thailand's Chairmanship that aims to make BIMSTEC Prosperous, Resilient and Robust and Open region.

14. “Prosperous” is the economic aspect that aims to enhance post-COVID-19 economic recovery by restarting the economic cycle, transforming the new economic system into a more sustainable and resilient one, and supporting business in connecting global supply chains. This also includes addressing poverty in the region by promoting trade, investment, and job creation, as well as strengthening the competitiveness of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises.

15. “Resilient and Robust” is the security dimension, Thailand supports BIMSTEC to be prepared to deal with all kinds of challenges and crises. This also includes supporting policies of other states in restoration, particularly in terms of food and public health security, to promote the region's recovery. Thailand is willing to share with all Member States the Bio-Circular-Green Economic Model or BCG, which Thailand has applied BCG as our National Plan for economic recovery after COVID-19.

16. "Open" refers to inclusivity and multi-stakeholder engagement in order to increasing the effectiveness of BIMSTEC by placing "people" at the heart of collaboration and permitting participation from all sectors at all steps of the process. Thailand plans to establish a platform named the "BIMSTEC Knowledge Platform" to make BIMSTEC more accessible to and available to all people, particularly the youth, and to increase awareness of the importance of BIMSTEC in conjunction with the 25th anniversary of BIMSTEC. Additionally, I would like to express my willingness to promote high-quality, sustainable, and environmentally responsible tourism.

17. I hope that Thailand's "PRO BIMSTEC" will be the key driving factor for our region to recover from the crises we are facing.

18. I reaffirm Thailand's commitment to advance BIMSTEC in all sectors. Thailand, as BIMSTEC Chair, under PRO BIMSTEC, which Thailand will be using to drive BIMSTEC cooperation. This will be the framework that shifts paradigms and propels us forward toward long-term advantages that support sustainable, balanced, and inclusive development.

19. Finally, I believe that with the commitment of each Member State, BIMSTEC will be able to collectively advance our objectives and evolve into effective partnership that benefits people, enhances the region's recovery, and enhance economic development sustainably and steadily.

I thank you.

Handovering Chairmanship

1. I wish to commend Sri Lanka for the successful Chairmanship despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing global political and economic uncertainties. This success is clearly demonstrated at this BIMSTEC Summit and the handing over of BIMSTEC Chairmanship today.
2. I am very delighted that today, Thailand will be assuming the BIMSTEC Chairmanship for two years after Sri Lanka. During our tenure, we pledge to build upon the success of Sri Lanka in driving BIMSTEC towards a region that is Prosperous, Resilient, and Open to new economic opportunities. This may be driven through our core vision of PRO BIMSTEC that I have mentioned earlier in three aspects.
3. First “Prosperous”, Thailand aims to support a prosperous BIMSTEC, through multilateral cooperation to reboot our economy in the post COVID-19. From now on, BIMSTEC will need to be more connected and should seek for long-term benefit from transnational logistic invention and technology to facilitate cross-border shifting within BIMSTEC.
4. Second, “Resilience” Thailand encourages BIMSTEC Member States to join hands to tackle with challenges especially on poverty, natural disaster, climate change, and pandemics, meanwhile, prioritize and support recovery policies of the Member States including usage of digital technology for our collective sustainable and balanced future.
5. Third “Open”, Thailand attaches high priority on “human capital” and encourages people from every sector to engage in BIMSTEC activities as well as raise awareness of opportunity and creative participation in all sectors.
6. In order to drive forward the PRO BIMSTEC, Thailand is delighted to present the BCG Economic Model (Bio economy, Circular Economy and Green Economy) that aims to support sustainable and balanced development of the region.
7. I sincerely hope that in the upcoming two years, BIMSTEC will be much more developed and strengthened as well as have the capability to face any future challenges.
8. Thailand’s determination as the next BIMSTEC Chair reflects in our Chairmanship logo and video clip which I would like to take this opportunity to present to you. The Golden Ears of Rice (Ruang Kao See Tong) and blue waves symbolize BIMSTEC as the world's food security sources and the connectivity of our region through maritime routes in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. The curves of the rice and waves along the edge of the logo illustrate prosperity in collective endeavoring, and also present the resilience and unity of all Member States as a stakeholder that helps perpetuate BIMSTEC forward towards a “Prosperous, Resilient, and Open BIMSTEC for all.”

Thank You
