

Remarks by H.E. Indra Mani Pandey, Secretary General of BIMSTEC at the IPCS-HD-BIMSTEC Policy Implementation Workshop on Climate Change and HA/DR in the Bay of Bengal held in Bangkok, Thailand on 24-25 October 2024

-Namaskar

-Ms. Ruhee Neog, Director, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies; Ambassador Venu Rajamony (Retd), Senior Advisor, South Asia, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue; Dr. Louise van Schaik, Head Unit EU and Global Affairs, Clingendael Institute; Distinguished Delegates from BIMSTEC member States, Partner Organisations and Regional Organisations; Ladies and Gentlemen, A very good morning to you all!

It gives me immense pleasure to speak at the opening of “Policy Implementation Workshop on Climate Change, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief in the Bay of Bengal.” BIMSTEC is pleased to co-host this workshop. We are grateful to the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue for inviting us to partner with them. This workshop demonstrates our shared commitment to address the interrelated challenges of the adverse impacts of climate change and providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in Bay of Bengal region. I am confident that this workshop will help advance our collective agenda of enhancing regional cooperation towards combatting climate change and providing prompt and adequate humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

The climate change due to global warming is one of the most pressing and disruptive contemporary global challenges that we are confronted with. In view of the fact that climate change is a global phenomenon and no country can deal with its causes and consequences on its own, combatting climate change requires collective global and regional action. Global climate action has been pursued within the context of UNFCCC. We are looking forward to successful outcome of 29th COP, which will held next month at Baku, taking forward the global action to deal with climate change and its consequences. We hope to make progress on issues such as migration, adaptation, climate change, loss and damage etc.

Beside global climate action, regional cooperation has been a crucial tool for addressing the pressing challenges of climate change and provision of timely and adequate disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. As we confront the growing challenge of climate change, induced by global warming, we need to work together at the regional level to prevent, mitigate and adapt to climate change. Collective

climate action at the regional level in Bay of Bengal is essential and is better suited due to shared concerns and priorities of the countries of the region. This workshop underscores the importance of regional cooperation in Bay of Bengal region and will contribute to its success in addressing the challenge of climate security in all its dimensions.

The regional cooperation that we have been pursuing through BIMSTEC will reinforce the initiatives taken by the member States individually to deal with the challenges of climate change.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the context of regional climate action, BIMSTEC is being seen as a potent regional organisation for forging regional cooperation in Bay of Bengal region, a region which is highly vulnerable to and has been acutely impacted by climate change. BIMSTEC member States are bound by historical, civilisational and cultural ties that provide a solid foundation for working together to realise their shared aspirations for a secured and prosperous Bay of Bengal region.

BIMSTEC has its own Charter and the requisite institutional mechanisms, including sectoral mechanisms, to pursue regional cooperation. BIMSTEC member States are like-minded on pursuit of regional cooperation and BIMSTEC enjoys the requisite political support of all its members States. BIMSTEC has been focused on pursuing technical and economic cooperation and it has stayed away from political issues. The Permanent Secretariat of BIMSTEC, established in Dhaka in 2014, anchors all its activities.

BIMSTEC has a vast and well organised agenda for regional cooperation, which is organized around 07 Sectors and 8 sub-sectors, with each member State playing leading role in one of the sectors. Bangladesh leads the Sector of Trade, Investment & Development, including Blue Economy; Bhutan leads the Sector of Environment & Climate Change, including Mountain Economy; India leads the Sector of Security, including Energy and Disaster Management; Myanmar leads the Sector of Agriculture & Food Security, including Fisheries & Livestock; Nepal leads the Sector of People-to-People Contact, including Poverty Alleviation; Sri Lanka leads the Sector of Science, Technology & Innovation, including Health & Human Resource Development; Thailand leads the Sector of Connectivity.

The Eminent Persons' Group, which was set-up by the member States to review the existing institutional mechanisms and areas of cooperation and define the future direction of the BIMSTEC, has submitted its report with a set of recommendations to reform and revitalize the BIMSTEC. These recommendations are being examined by the member States with a view to implement them. BIMSTEC is thus poised to evolve into a vibrant and dynamic regional organization.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Bay of Bengal region, which is home to around a quarter of the world's population, has been a victim of the climate change. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events and shifting climatic patterns have posed severe threats to livelihoods, ecosystems and sustainable development of the countries in the region. The growing frequency and intensity of natural disasters in recent years have highlighted the need for robust, coordinated and timely disaster relief and humanitarian assistance as well as creation of resilient infrastructure.

The BIMSTEC member States are committed to developing and implementing policies to realise sustainable development, address the challenge of climate change and provide timely disaster relief and humanitarian responses in times of disaster. Under the BIMSTEC framework, Environment and Climate Change is one of the 7 agreed sectors for regional cooperation. HADR has also been an important area of collaboration.

The Joint Working Group on Environment and Climate Change has finalized a "Plan of Action on Environment and Climate Change", focusing on three key areas: Biodiversity, Waste Management, and Climate Change. An Action Matrix to operationalize the Plan of Action has also been prepared. Realizing the significance of Mountains in economic development, environmental protection and ecological sustainability of BIMSTEC member States, Mountain Economy has also been included as a sub-sector for collaboration within BIMSTEC. The Inter-governmental Expert Group on Mountain Economy has already finalized A "Plan of Action on Mountain Economy." Director Mr Dorzi will share with you more details.

Given the critical importance of prompt humanitarian assistance and disaster response in case of natural disasters in our member States, we have finalised last month the "BIMSTEC Guidelines for Maritime Component of Humanitarian

Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR),” which will provide a framework for HADR operations in response to natural disasters, fostering a shared understanding of HADR protocols and practices in Bay of Bengal region. We have also conducted “BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercises” to enhance our regional preparedness for disasters, facilitating sharing of expertise and resources. The BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate, located in National Capital Region of India, provides the member States with valuable data on climate trends and disaster forecasting. It has been doing so in close collaboration with the meteorological departments of the member States. Director Prashant Chandran will brief you in detail about these developments.

Five of 7 BIMSTEC member States are also members of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), which has been leading the global efforts aimed at creating disaster-resilient infrastructure. BIMSTEC has reached out to CDRI with a view to cooperate with it for enhancing the resilience of the infrastructure of our member States. We are also reaching out to the International Solar Alliance in order to assist our member States with enhancing their renewable and clean energy capacity. We have also approached the UNFCCC Secretariat for becoming an observer.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Given the importance of transition to green and clean energy for sustainable development, BIMSTEC has also been working towards forging cooperation among its member States in energy sector. We are exploring cooperation in developing green energy solutions and plan to set up an Energy Investment Facilitation Forum to promote investment in green energy projects.

BIMSTEC member States have earnestly pursued the goal of Grid Interconnection, which will enable them trade in electricity with one another. The BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Coordination Committee has been working on delineating policies for electricity transmission and trade as well as tariff system for cross-border electricity exchange. A broad Energy Master Plan is being developed with the help of Asian Development Bank. This plan will address any gaps in creating a regional electricity grid and avoid duplicating the existing efforts. The plan is expected to support an inclusive, affordable transition to green energy for all BIMSTEC member States.

Additionally, the BIMSTEC Energy Centre, located in Bengaluru, which will become operational soon, will serve as a hub for knowledge-sharing and research on energy development, policies and technologies. The Centre will focus on energy transition and provide data and insights to help member countries make informed decisions. BIMSTEC is thus committed to assist member States in their effort aimed at promoting green energy, improving energy connectivity, better utilizing their renewable energy resources and strengthening their energy security.

As regards food security, which is an important aspect of climate security, agriculture and food security sector including fisheries and livestock has been an important pillar of cooperation within BIMSTEC framework. We have agreed Plans of Action and we have taken steps to implement them.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This workshop provides an important platform for exchanging best practices, experiences and ideas, aimed at strengthening capacities to respond swiftly and effectively to the challenges posed by climate change, including through prompt humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The workshop is also expected to help streamline regional HADR guidelines by engaging experts from the countries in the region.

As regards our Partners in hosting this Workshop, as you are aware, IPCS is one of prominent global think-tanks. Established in 1996, it aims to provide policy alternatives on peace and security issues for South Asia and the wider neighborhood. IPCS has extensive experience in pioneering research on security issues, including climate security, convening strategic dialogues and building sustainable institutional relationships through its longstanding global reach.

Significantly, the Global Strategy 2024-2027 of our other partner, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, has identified climate change as a threat to global security. It has successfully co-hosted four editions of Track 1.5 'Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue,' with a view to address maritime security issues and promote regional maritime cooperation in Bay of Bengal.

I am pleased that this workshop is going to focus on policy implementation through a table-top exercise to review the implementation of existing HADR guidelines. It is essential that our policies and guidelines are not only well-designed but also aligned with the ground realities, ensuring that they deliver the desired outcomes. I am confident that this workshop will yield new insights and enable us to delineate concrete steps to strengthen our capacity and efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change and provide HADR. We are looking forward to some concrete recommendations to guide our efforts in future.

In conclusion, I extend my gratitude to our co-organizers, IPCS and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, for their partnership with BIMSTEC. We are looking forward to working together with them in future towards strengthening regional cooperation in Bay of Bengal region in order to deal with other development challenges. I am confident that this workshop will be successful in achieving its objectives. Thank you for your kind attention and I wish you all fruitful deliberations during the workshop. Have a joyful day!