

Statement by the BIMSTEC Secretary General H.E Mr. Indra Mani Pandey at the Plenary session of Sagarmatha Sambaad: “Climate Change, Mountains and the Future of Humanity”

16 May 2025

The Soaltee, Kathmandu

Honourable Foreign Minister Dr. Arzu Rana Deuba

Honourable Minister for Forests and Environment Mr. Ain Bahadur Shahi Thakuri

Excellencies, distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Namaskar, Good Afternoon to you all!

I am honored to represent BIMSTEC at the inaugural Sagarmatha Sambaad- A Global Dialogue on Climate Change, Mountains and the Future of Humanity. I congratulate and commend the Government of Nepal for convening this Sambaad, which allows us to engage in meaningful discourse on climate change and its adverse impact and identify pathways for global action to ensure a climate-resilient and sustainable future for both the planet and the people. I am confident that the ideas and initiatives emerging from this Sambaad will contribute to advancing global and regional climate action. I thank the Government of Nepal, a valued member of BIMSTEC, for its kind invitation and warm hospitality.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The setting of this Sambaad in lap of majestic Sagarmatha, Mount Everest, is deeply symbolic. Once seen as immutable, our mountain ecosystems have been adversely affected by global warming. The theme of this Conference underscores a fundamental reality: the destiny of humanity is intricately linked with the fate of our mountains and the ecosystems nurtured by them and our response to the dangers posed to them by the climate changes.

As you are aware, what happens in the highlands ultimately shapes the lowlands, the coasts and the oceans. Mountains regulate the water cycles that sustain our crops, livelihoods and daily lives. They influence weather patterns that control everything from rainfall to the severity of storms. Thus, protecting mountains is not merely an environmental obligation, but also a developmental necessity. Addressing this challenge demands urgent, coordinated and inclusive action at all levels nationally, regionally and globally.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Climate change is no longer a distant concern. Its impact, from melting glaciers and rising sea levels to erratic monsoons and prolonged droughts, is being felt across the globe.

Mountain ecosystems, especially in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, are most vulnerable to climate change. The Himalayas, often called the “Third Pole,” are warming at nearly twice the global average. These shifts are leading to more frequent, intense and unpredictable natural disasters-disrupting food security, displacing communities, and endangering livelihood.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this context, the role of regional organizations becomes not only relevant but indispensable. Regional Organizations, like BIMSTEC, which I represent, comprising countries with shared geography and developmental challenges, are uniquely positioned to respond at regional level to global challenges such as climate change.

As you are aware, BIMSTEC, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, was founded in June 1997 and has been in existence for almost 28 years. It brings together 7 countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. It has on its agenda 17 sectors of cooperation, with each member State leading one or more sectors to ensure equitable participation and role. The Permanent Secretariat of BIMSTEC, established in Dhaka in 2014, anchors all its activities.

BIMSTEC is the only regional organization, which brings together 5 countries from South Asia and 2 countries from Southeast Asia and acts as a bridge between the two. It has its own Charter and well-established decision-making mechanisms and operates on the principle of consensus. It enjoys the requisite political support of its members, focuses on technical and economic cooperation and stays away from divisive political issues. BIMSTEC has evolved into a vibrant and dynamic regional organization.

The recently concluded 6th BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok imparted a huge impetus to regional cooperation in Bay of Bengal. It was attended by the Heads of the Government of all the member States, including Honourable PM of Nepal. Apart from the adoption of Summit Declaration, the Leaders adopted BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030, Report of the Eminent Persons' Group, and BIMSTEC Rules of Procedures. The Summit also witnessed signing of the BIMSTEC Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation and MoUs with UNODC and IORA.

Environment and Climate Change has been a key priority for regional cooperation under BIMSTEC. During the 6th BIMSTEC Summit, Leaders endorsed “BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Environment and Climate Change” which focuses on three key areas: Biodiversity, Waste Management, and Climate Change. An Action Matrix to operationalize the Plan of Action has also been agreed.

BIMSTEC has recognized the importance of mountain ecosystems for ecological balance, economic development and environmental sustainability. Mountains and hills in BIMSTEC region are home to approximately 126 million persons and cover nearly 1.1 million square kilometers of the total land area. Most of the large rivers flowing in and through the BIMSTEC member States originate in Himalayas and are important for hydropower, agriculture, fishery, livestock and transport.

Recognizing the vital need for regional cooperation to protect delicate ecosystem of mountains, Mountain Economy has been identified as a sector for collaboration within BIMSTEC. The Inter-governmental Expert Group on Mountain Economy has already finalized a “Plan of Action on Mountain Economy” which outlines key priorities including compact mountain settlements, enhanced connectivity, clean energy promotion, ecosystem and environment protection and development of green tourism and sustainable livelihoods.

In order to deal with the challenge of global warming, the BIMSTEC member States have also prioritized transition to green energy. BIMSTEC has adopted a Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation and a Memorandum of Understanding for BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection has been in force since April 2019. A BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Master Plan is under discussion. We are in the process of finalizing the BIMSTEC Policy for Transmission of Electricity as well as the BIMSTEC Policy for Trade, Exchange of Electricity and Tariff Mechanism.

Several dedicated BIMSTEC Centres further support our regional climate actions. The BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate in Noida, India, provides critical weather forecasts and early warning services; and the BIMSTEC Energy Centre in Bengaluru, India, is mandated to promote cooperation in renewable energy and energy efficiency.

The BIMSTEC Expert Group on Disaster Management is currently engaged in finalizing a Plan of Action to improve Preparedness and Coordination for responding to natural disasters in the Bay of Bengal Region. Three rounds of BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise have been held; the 4th round is being scheduled. Further, India has offered to establish a BIMSTEC Disaster Management Centre, which will enhance regional cooperation in responding disasters and reducing risk of disasters.

Further, the BIMSTEC Secretariat is actively pursuing partnerships with the international and regional organizations, which are engaged in global and regional Climate Action such as United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, UN Women, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, International Solar Alliance and World Meteorological Organization etc. with a view to leveraging their knowledge, resources, expertise and programmes for enhancing regional cooperation under BIMSTEC for climate action.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that BIMSTEC offers an inclusive and effective platform to promote regional collaboration in environment and climate change, green energy transition, disaster management and other climate change related challenges in Bay of Bengal region. We are committed to forging meaningful partnerships and advancing tangible actions for a sustainable and climate-resilient future.

Once again, I thank the Government of Nepal for inviting me to this historic Sagarmatha Sambaad. I wish you all fruitful deliberations and a highly successful Sagarmatha Sambaad.

Thank you for your kind attention!!! Namaskar!