

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY LYONCHHEN DASHO  
TSHERING TOBGAY, PRIME MINISTER, KINGDOM OF  
BHUTAN AT THE SIXTH BIMSTEC SUMMIT**

**4 APRIL 2025, BANGKOK, THAILAND**

Your Excellency Madam Paetongtarn Shinawatra, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand,

Your Excellency Muhammad Yunus, Chief Advisor, People's Republic of Bangladesh,

Your Excellency Shri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister, Republic of India

Your Excellency Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Chairman, State Administration Council and Prime Minister, Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Your Excellency Right Honourable KP Sharma Oli, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal

Your Excellency Hon Dr. Harini Amarasuriya, Prime Minister, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Distinguished Delegates,

Secretary General of BIMSTEC

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

***SAWADEE KHARP* and Good morning!**

1. As we gather here today for the BIMSTEC Summit, I would like to take a moment to extend, on behalf of the Royal Government and the people of Bhutan, our deepest condolences to the governments and peoples of Myanmar and Thailand following the devastating earthquake that struck your nations last week. The tragic loss of lives, injuries, and widespread damage to property has left us profoundly saddened. In this difficult time, Bhutan stands in solidarity with you. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families mourning their loved ones, those injured, and the many displaced by this tragedy. Natural disasters such as these remind us of the shared vulnerability and the urgent need for regional unity in fostering resilience and preparedness.

**Excellencies,**

2. It is an honour for me to join the esteemed leaders of BIMSTEC Member States for the Sixth Summit in this beautiful and vibrant city of Bangkok. I bring warm greetings from His Majesty The King and the people of Bhutan and their best wishes for the success of our meeting.
3. I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Government of Thailand for the warm reception and gracious hospitality extended to me and my delegation. You have left no stone unturned and I noticed that the flowers before us perfectly match the colour of our respective national flags. Thailand is like a second home for the Bhutanese, bound by our shared Buddhist values and deep reverence for the institution of Monarchy.
4. I commend the Royal Thai Government for its exemplary stewardship of BIMSTEC over the past three years during which we have witnessed significant progress in our endeavour to enhance cooperation and integration within our region. I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to the Prime Minister, Madam Paetongtarn Shinawatra for her stewardship as Chair of BIMSTEC. Madam Prime Minister, I am confident that under your able leadership, our deliberation today will yield positive outcomes. Let me also convey my appreciation to the Secretary General of BIMSTEC and his dedicated team at the BIMSTEC Secretariat for their hard work and efforts in carrying out the mandate of our important organisation.

**Excellencies,**

5. As we gather here today and reflect on nearly three decades of BIMSTEC, we would all agree that our progress has been incremental at best, and our achievement lag behind our ambitions. This is echoed in the reports by our Secretary General and the Eminent Persons Group. BIMSTEC has not lived up to its potential. It is almost 30 years since its establishment and we are just hosting our 6th Summit.
6. As global challenges multiply from climate emergencies to economic volatility, the urgency to transform BIMSTEC into a result oriented organisation has never been greater. It is now time for us to be resolute in our actions and deliver tangible results for our people. We have a Charter that provides legal standing and institutional mechanisms to advance cooperation in clearly identified areas. Above all, we have an ambitious goal to achieve

the BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030 for “**A Prosperous, Resilient and Open BIMSTEC**”.

7. This Vision encapsulates the aspiration of our organization, our countries and our people. It provides us with a clear roadmap towards a stronger, more integrated and forward-looking region. Bhutan stands ready to work with fellow members to turn this vision into reality. In this regard, allow me to highlight some of the key areas, which from Bhutan’s perspective, are critical to achieve this vision.
8. We must prioritise **trade & investment**. BIMSTEC was founded to boost economic growth in our region through deeper integration. While the potential for intra-regional trade is enormous, actual trade remains significantly low. The Framework Agreement on BIMSTEC Free Trade Area (FTA), signed twenty years ago, has seen little progress despite numerous negotiations by the Trade Negotiating Committee and its several constituent working groups. We must, therefore, accelerate efforts to achieve a BIMSTEC Free Trade Area at the earliest. Without economic integration, shared prosperity remains an aspiration rather, not a reality.
9. Resilience demands preparedness, adaptability and unity in the face of shared threat. The impacts of **climate change** that we are all too familiar with, are felt universally, yet they are often most severe in the most vulnerable regions like ours. Increased frequency of natural disasters, changing weather patterns and biodiversity loss underscore the importance of greater cooperation in environmental protection and climate resilience. We must recognise that this is not merely an environmental issue, it is a humanitarian, economic, and security challenge that requires an urgent and united response. I welcome the BIMSTEC initiatives in this regard and call for effective implementation of the Plan of Action for Environment and Climate Change including on the Mountain Economy.
10. For Bhutan, safeguarding our natural environment is not just an obligation; it is a core component of our national ethos, enshrined in our development philosophy of **Gross National Happiness (GNH)**. Our commitment to nature is deep-rooted and has guided our policies and actions across decades. Given Bhutan’s success in both policy and implementation in the conservation of the environment, and having achieved 70% forest coverage and carbon-negative status, Bhutan stands ready to share our experience and practices.

11. I am pleased to inform this august assembly that, recognizing the urgency of climate action, Bhutan along with Madagascar, Panama, and Suriname launched **G-ZERO Forum** at COP29 last November. This platform unites carbon-negative and carbon-neutral nations to lead by example, demonstrate what is possible and advocate for a united global response to the triple planetary crisis that humanity faces of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. BIMSTEC and the G-ZERO Forum share a common vision of economic growth without compromising environmental sustainability. I therefore, invite all BIMSTEC Member States to engage with this initiative, towards a more sustainable and climate resilient future.

**Excellencies,**

12. When the earthquake struck Myanmar and Thailand last week, BIMSTEC as an organisation did not have a mechanism to collectively respond to this natural disaster. This has served as a stark reminder of the inherent risks we face and the urgent need for collaboration and preparedness. In the face of such vulnerabilities, it is imperative that we work together to strengthen our resilience. Let us take actionable steps towards establishing a comprehensive framework for disaster preparedness and response that can safeguard our communities from natural disasters in the future.

**Excellencies,**

13. As we envision an Open BIMSTEC, connectivity is vital. In a region as diverse as ours, enhancing both digital and physical connectivity is imperative, not just for economic growth but for fostering deeper bonds among all our citizens. First, **Digital Connectivity** should be a key area of cooperation to harness the power of technology and foster sustainable development for all our countries. For a landlocked country like Bhutan, digital infrastructure and digital connectivity are key to our growth and prosperity and Bhutan looks forward to cooperation with BIMSTEC Member States in these areas. Bhutan has taken a number of digital transformation initiatives such as the National Digital Identity (NDI), a decentralized and self-sovereign system, using block chain technology, which is a first-of-its-kind initiative globally. The approach is designed to provide a secure, verifiable and inclusive digital identity system for Bhutanese citizens. Bhutan also launched a National Digital Strategy called “Intelligent Bhutan”. It focuses on digital governance, digital economy, and digital society. We

would be happy to share our digital transformation experiences with Member States and learn from your experiences.

14. Second, **Physical Connectivity** is of paramount importance for trade, both within the region and beyond. Access to sea routes is vital for ensuring our nations can engage effectively both in regional and international trade, and for landlocked states, this access is an important avenue for economic growth and development. In this regard, Bhutan welcomes the signing of the BIMSTEC Maritime Transport Cooperation Agreement. While Bhutan does not have direct maritime access, the agreement offers us the opportunity to have access to sea through our BIMSTEC maritime neighbours.
15. Similarly, **Air connectivity** is vital for facilitating faster and more convenient travel for our citizens and visitors alike. By establishing more direct flights between our nations, we can not only promote tourism but also enable the swift exchange of goods and services. Equally important is the development of **rail connectivity**, which can serve as the backbone of trade and commerce in BIMSTEC. A robust rail network linking our Member States can lower transportation costs, ease the movement of goods, and provide a sustainable mode of transport that aligns with our goals of environmental conservation.
16. Another key component of open BIMSTEC lies in promoting **People-to-People Contact**. The richness of our diverse cultural heritage and traditions provide a unique opportunity to foster deeper connections amongst all our people. Strengthening the ties among our citizens fosters a sense of solidarity and mutual understanding that transcends borders. Educational exchanges, tourism, cultural collaborations, and sporting events can bridge gaps between our nations, creating long-lasting friendships and alliances. As entrepreneurs, investors and innovators connect across borders, they create opportunities for trade, investment and technology exchanges. Moreover, in our increasingly digital world, it is crucial that we leverage technology to connect our citizens. Virtual platforms for dialogue, digital cultural exchanges, and innovative collaborations can help us engage with one another. Let us, therefore, commit ourselves to fostering such contacts, embracing diversity and working hand in hand towards a more prosperous, resilient and open BIMSTEC.

## Excellencies,

17. BIMSTEC's vision aligns with Bhutan's aspirations and priorities. Bhutan is convinced that a stronger and more vibrant BIMSTEC will ensure prosperity for our people, and enable us to collectively address global challenges and opportunities to our benefit. Bhutan has launched a number of ambitious initiatives that will leverage the benefits from the rapid growth and advancement of our neighbours, and our cooperation with BIMSTEC.
18. One key initiative is the **Gelephu Mindfulness City** envisioned by our His Majesty The King Jigme. The GMC is a transformative vision for future urban spaces, a blueprint for living mindfully and sustainably. Spanning 2500 square kilometers of pristine forests and fertile farmlands, it will enable human innovation and natural ecosystems to thrive together, while fostering human well-being, environmental sustainability and mindful living. Bhutan hopes to position Gelephu Mindfulness City as a destination for global investments into the city as well as a conduit for investments into the BIMSTEC region.
19. In pursuing the goals of BIMSTEC, particularly in the areas of connectivity, economic growth, and people-to-people ties, the Gelephu Mindfulness City can serve as a model for a cross-border initiative that can strengthen economic integration and collaboration, promoting sustainable development. The city as envisioned presents a unique opportunity for all BIMSTEC Member States to engage in collaboration that transcends conventional urban development approaches. I invite our fellow BIMSTEC Member States to participate in this pioneering initiative so that we can draw upon the strengths and experiences of all our BIMSTEC Member States.
20. Having successfully graduated from the category of Least Developed Countries in December 2023, Bhutan is working towards ensuring a sustainable and irreversible transition guided by the 13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan launched in July 2024. In this regard, I would like to thank the Government of India for the invaluable assistance extended to Bhutan throughout our socio-economic development journey. Transforming Bhutan into a high income country by achieving a GDP of US\$10 billion and GDP per capita of US\$ 12,000 by 2034 are major goals of the 13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. Bhutan has also launched a 21st Century Economic Roadmap – a 10X National Economic Vision, to increase our progress by threefold, in February this year.

These initiatives will require Bhutan to be more actively engaged with our BIMSTEC partners, and with the wider international community.

21. Last but not least, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the **Eminent Persons' Group** for their report on the Future Direction of BIMSTEC. We commend the EPG, who within a short time-frame carried out an in depth study of BIMSTEC's performance since its establishment, and has presented concrete recommendations on the way forward. The insights and analysis presented in the report reflects a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing BIMSTEC. It is imperative that we act decisively on these recommendations.
22. In **conclusion**, I am confident that our 6<sup>th</sup> Summit will provide the much-needed impetus for our organization to grow and achieve our common aspirations. BIMSTEC has the potential to be a transformational force in our region, home to nearly 22 percent of the global population. We can drive economic growth, foster innovation and address the pressing challenges of our time. However, this will not happen automatically - we must work deliberately together to realise the potential for all our people. As is often said, BIMSTEC is a bridge between South Asia and South East Asia. Let us work to be a true bridge to link peoples and countries and bring growth and prosperity for all. The Royal Government of Bhutan stands fully committed to the BIMSTEC, as the country's growth and prosperity is closely linked to the growth of our entire region.

**Thank you and Tashi Delek!**