

**Opening of the Summit and Welcome Address
by H.E. Ms. Paetongtarn Shinawatra
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand
at the 6th BIMSTEC Summit
on 4 April 2025, 10.00 – 12.00 hrs. at Bangkok, Thailand**

Excellencies,

Mr. Secretary General,

Distinguishes guests,

At the outset, we convene the Summit here today with heavy hearts, united in grief and solidarity, due to the recent earthquakes in Myanmar and also affecting Thailand. I would like to extend my heartfelt condolences to those who have lost their loved ones in this tragedy. In times of such hardship, the strength of our unity has never been more critical. Let us be in solidarity with the victims and their families, and reaffirm our commitment to supporting the recovery efforts in the affected areas.

Before we proceed any further, I would like to ask for a moment of silence to reflect on the gravity of this tragedy, and show our respect for those affected by the recent earthquakes.

Thank you.

Let us now proceed with our work, guided by the spirit of solidarity and cooperation.

It is with great pleasure and profound honour that I welcome all of you to Bangkok for the 6th BIMSTEC Summit. On behalf of our people and the Government of Thailand, I extend a warm and heartfelt welcome to all our esteemed leaders and delegates.

This Summit holds special significance for all of us, especially Thailand, as it is **the first in-person** gathering of BIMSTEC leaders in seven years.

Some of us may even reflect on the past 21 years, **since Thailand first hosted the inaugural BIMSTEC Summit here in Bangkok in 2004**. From that day on, our seven Member States — bound together by ties of history, culture, and a deep sense of cooperation — have forged a unique partnership that **bridges South Asia and Southeast Asia**. This cooperation continues to grow stronger, and today,

we come together to renew our shared aspirations for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable future.

As we meet today, amid growing complexities in our interconnected world, especially the current geo-political and geo-economic uncertainties, Thailand wishes to lend a strong voice for strengthening regional solidarity, cooperation and multilateralism, which is the foundation of BIMSTEC. With a total population of 1.8 billion, or 22% of the world's population, and with the combined GDP of BIMSTEC countries currently standing at about 4.5 trillion US dollars, or 4.3% of the world's GDP, our combined voice is indeed a strong one.

It is within this spirit of unity and collective strength that Thailand has introduced the “**BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030**” — a framework designed to guide our journey towards a **Prosperous, Resilient, and Open** future. This Vision aims to build a region that is stronger, more connected, and better equipped to tackle the challenges of our generations.

Excellencies,

As we move forward, let us focus on the three pillars that will shape BIMSTEC's future — a BIMSTEC that is Prosperous, Resilient, and Open.

First, for a Prosperous BIMSTEC.

As a grouping that represents nearly a quarter of the world's population, BIMSTEC holds significant potential in the global economy. With our growing trade and investment flows, and the immense capital potential within our region — we can, and we should, mobilize our collective leverage to advocate for greater economic opportunities. Currently, our intra-regional trade within BIMSTEC stands at just over 6%, compared to approximately 23% of ASEAN. This highlights the untapped potential for deeper economic integration. Therefore, I urge all Member States to work together to finalize the **BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement** at the earliest opportunity, as it will be a key instrument to unlock this potential.

Our Prosperity also relies on **connectivity**, which plays a crucial role in enabling the efficient movement of goods, reducing transaction costs and barriers, boosting market access, and, hence, promoting economic integration and growth. At this Summit, we have witnessed a historic milestone with the signing of the **Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation**. This landmark Agreement will significantly strengthen our maritime links and create more efficient, cost-effective trade routes across the Bay of Bengal.

Thailand is also advancing the **Landbridge project**, a strategic initiative that directly supports our efforts to enhance connectivity. This project aims to **link the Gulf of Thailand with the Bay of Bengal**, connecting vital sea and land routes across our region, and directly supporting our vision for a more interconnected BIMSTEC.

To further complement the effort to improve regional integration, Thailand remains committed to working with all sides for the timely completion of the **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway**. The recent earthquake in Myanmar has **further disrupted the progress** of the project, highlighting the challenges our region faces from natural disasters. Besides the challenges from natural disasters, **peace, security and stability** are also very critical. Therefore, Thailand welcomes the recent announcements of temporary ceasefire to enable assistance to the people affected by the recent calamity. Thailand is committed to collaborating with all Member States to overcome these challenges, and ensure its realisation. We believe the Trilateral Highway will significantly enhance connectivity across the BIMSTEC region, benefiting both coastal and landlocked members, and further strengthening the region's economic potential.

However, physical infrastructure alone is not enough. To unlock the full potential of our connectivity, we must also strengthen our digital infrastructure and technological capabilities. We must utilize **advanced technology, particularly AI and digital connectivity**, to optimize efficiency and maximize results in addressing these pressing issues, and ensure that our region is best equipped to tackle both present and future challenges.

Second, for a Resilient BIMSTEC.

Global challenges, such as air pollution, climate change, and pandemics, have underscored the limitations in our healthcare systems, supply chains, and economies. These events have shown us the urgent need for increased resilience across our region.

In response to these challenges, Thailand has proposed the establishment of a **BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence on Tropical Medicine** to address the pressing need for stronger healthcare systems and regional resilience.

The recent tragedy underscores the urgent need for stronger regional cooperation on disaster management within BIMSTEC. In this regard, Thailand **fully supports India's proposal for the establishment of the BIMSTEC Disaster Management Centre**. This initiative is timely and important for strengthening our

collective capacity to respond effectively to natural disasters, especially in developing a robust early-warning system. Thailand also supports the convening of **the Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Disaster Management Cooperation** at the earliest opportunity, to enhance our shared resilience against natural disasters.

Equally important is our collective response to the growing threat of transnational crimes, including human trafficking, illicit drug trafficking, and cybercrime. It is crucial that we work together to ensure the full implementation of **the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime, and Illicit Drug Trafficking**, for securing our region and strengthening our collective resilience.

Third, for an Open BIMSTEC.

Thailand is committed to ensuring that all sectors in our economies, particularly the **private sector**, play a crucial role in BIMSTEC's future. A key aspect of this is **empowering our small and medium enterprises (SMEs)**, which are the backbone of our economies. By strengthening their capacity to participate in the global supply chain, we can unlock new opportunities for growth, innovation, and job creation across our region.

To facilitate this, Thailand has proposed the **establishment of the BIMSTEC Business Advisory Council (BAC)**, which aims to foster stronger networks, support business growth, and contribute to our region's long-term economic resilience and competitiveness. I hope that all Member States will join Thailand in supporting this important vision.

At the same time, promoting inclusivity across all societal segments, including marginalized communities, women, and youth, will foster equality of opportunity. The **"BIMSTEC Young Gen Forum"** held yesterday is a perfect example of our faithfulness to nurturing future leaders to shape the region's agenda. By prioritizing inclusiveness, we can create a region where every individual has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

Furthermore, strengthening our people-to-people ties will further enhance connectivity within BIMSTEC. We should take concrete steps to **promote intra-BIMSTEC tourism**, strengthen our public-private partnerships, and develop thematic circuits that connect key destinations across BIMSTEC countries. These efforts will significantly deepen our shared cultural and economic bonds.

An Open BIMSTEC also extends beyond our borders. As **an active promoter of peace and common prosperity**, Thailand believes in the power of cooperation and synergy to address global challenges. In this spirit, as the **current Chair of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue, or ACD**, Thailand is committed to fostering collaboration between BIMSTEC and other international platforms. We aim to strengthen our regional objectives while contributing to the broader agenda of sustainable development, peace, and stability.

Excellencies,

The success of our Summit today reaffirms our shared commitment to collaboration over competition, inclusion over exclusion, and the role of BIMSTEC as a building block for addressing common challenges.

As we look ahead, our focus must remain on delivering concrete results. The strength of BIMSTEC lies in our ability to turn commitments into action, ensuring that our cooperation translates into real benefits for our peoples. With this spirit in mind, let us work together to build a **Prosperous, Resilient, and Open** region.

In light of these reflections, I hereby **declare the 6th BIMSTEC Summit officially open**.

Thank you.
