

**Statement by H.E Indra Mani Pandey, BIMSTEC Secretary General at the  
High-level dialogue with subregional organizations**

**Agenda item 2(b) Subregional perspectives on opportunities and  
solutions for a sustainable future,**

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Thank you Chair

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Good Morning to you all,  
Namaskaar,

It's a great honour and privilege to share perspectives of BIMSTEC on opportunities and solutions for a sustainable future. I wish to thank Executive Secretary of UNESCAP for her initiatives to engage closely with regional organizations, like BIMSTEC, and for convening this dialogue. I also commend UNESCAP for its initiative to bring together various regional and sub-regional organizations in Asia and the Pacific in order to enable them to engage in exchange of views on their vision, agenda and priorities and to explore opportunities for cooperation among themselves.

As noted in the Concept Note for this Dialogue, various regions and sub-regions of Asia and the Pacific are characterized by diverse development trajectories, demographic profiles, institutional capacities and exposure to risks. These differences, while presenting challenges, also offer significant opportunities for mutual learning, complementarity and collective action. In this context, our dialogue this morning assumes a high importance, enabling us to explore opportunities for strengthening subregional and inter-subregional cooperation.

As I had noted in my statement during the General Debate, global multilateral institutions are facing enormous challenges. As a result, the salience of minilateralism and regionalism has naturally grown. Regional organizations like BIMSTEC are being seen as suitable platforms to forge cooperation amongst the countries located in a region or sub-region.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

7 BIMSTEC member States, located adjacent and close to Bay of Bengal, face similar developmental and transnational security challenges which they realize that they cannot deal with alone. Hence, they are keen to forge regional cooperation under BIMSTEC.

Since its inception, almost 29 years ago, BIMSTEC has made significant progress. It has adopted its own Charter and has institutionalized the requisite core and sectoral mechanisms. Guided by BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030, it has adopted a comprehensive agenda, comprising 18 sectors of cooperation. The Agenda of BIMSTEC is fully aligned with SDGs Agenda 2030. BIMSTEC is fully committed to the goal of inclusive, resilient and sustainable development.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

As one of the objectives of this Dialogue is to share with you information about various initiatives undertaken by BIMSTEC towards inclusive, resilient and sustainable development, allow me to speak briefly about progress and priorities in regional cooperation under BIMSTEC in various relevant sectors.

Agriculture and allied sectors remain critically important for livelihood and food security in the BIMSTEC member States. There are a number of significant initiatives under their consideration: establishment of a BIMSTEC Food Reserve; creation of a BIMSTEC Seed Bank; promotion of regional trade in agricultural commodities and promotion of climate resilient agriculture. A network of Agricultural R & D institutions of the member States has been created. The Plan of Action also focuses on promoting Sustainable Agricultural Practices The Centre of Excellence for Agriculture being established by India is envisioned as the anchor for regional agricultural cooperation.

Given the centrality of connectivity to sustainable and inclusive development, BIMSTEC member States have accorded a high priority to connectivity, including transport connectivity, people to people connectivity and digital connectivity. The “BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity”, which was adopted at the 5th BIMSTEC Summit in March 2022, is being implemented. The BIMSTEC “Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation”, which was signed at the 6th BIMSTEC Summit, aims at enhancing maritime trade and travel amongst the member States, including cruise tourism. We have held 2 editions of

BIMSTEC Ports Conclave. We are also engaged in negotiation of a “BIMSTEC Motor Vehicles Agreement”, which will facilitate land connectivity amongst the member States. India has proposed to establish "BIMSTEC Sustainable Maritime Transport Centre" in India. India has also made proposals for assisting BIMSTEC member States in creating digital public infrastructure in order to boost digital connectivity.

Various initiatives to strengthen cooperation in culture and tourism have been contributing to expanding people to people relations. Nepal has proposed to set up a Centre of Excellence for cooperation in Tourism and Culture.

BIMSTEC member States have been severely impacted by unforeseen changes in weather and climate patterns due to global warming. They have been victims of unprecedented natural disasters. The Plans of Action under Environment and Climate Change as well as Mountain Economy Sectors are under implementation. The BIMSTEC Centre of Weather and Climate has been assisting the member States with tailored weather forecasts, early warning and capacity development.

As regards disaster management, 4 rounds of BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise have been held. India has initiated steps to establish a BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence in Disaster Management. The Plan of Action for Disaster Management is aimed at providing a collective BIMSTEC disaster response. BIMSTEC Guidelines for Maritime Component of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) have been finalized. Further, BIMSTEC Guidelines for Coordinated Marine Oil Spill Response are also being finalized.

Given the high importance of energy security, the BIMSTEC member States have prioritized cooperation in Energy sector in order to realize their goals of transition to green energy and sustainable development. There has, therefore, been focus on interconnection of power grids of the member States. The BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Master Plan is being finalized. A BIMSTEC Energy Centre (BEC) has been set up in Bengaluru, India. It is mandated to anchor research and development and capacity building; management of BIMSTEC Grid after inter-connection; and promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency.

As regards regional cooperation in health sector, a vital SDG, the BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Health Cooperation is under implementation.

A World Bank Project on Strengthening Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response and Health Systems Resilience, applicable to 5 BIMSTEC member States from South Asia, is under implementation. Inaugural meeting of BIMSTEC Health Ministers has been planned to be hosted by Sri Lanka. Thailand has initiated the process for establishing BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence on Tropical Medicine. A BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine has been set up. Development of a BIMSTEC Traditional Medicine Portal has been agreed as also sharing of Pharmacopoeia of the BIMSTEC member States. India has initiated the process to set up a BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence in Traditional Medicine.

With regard to enhancing people to people connectivity, a number of BIMSTEC Youth and Sport Events have been organized and planned. A BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks (BNPTT), which brings together 7 Think Tanks, one each from 7 member States, has been created and has met 8 times. An Association of BIMSTEC Speakers and Parliamentarians is being set up.

With a view to promote cooperation in science and technology, a technology transfer facility is being set up in Colombo. Regional cooperation in innovation, digital technology and AI is being prioritized.

BIMSTEC member States have been committed to enhance intra-BIMSTEC Trade and Investment. The Framework Agreement on BIMSTEC Free Trade Area (FTA) was signed in 2004. Six separate Working Groups have been negotiating constituent agreements on Trade in Goods; Trade in Services; Investment; Dispute Settlement and other legal matters; Customs Cooperation; and Trade Facilitation. They have made significant progress and we are hopeful of concluding these negotiations at the earliest.

The process for establishing a BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce has been initiated. An Expert Group on Fiscal and Monetary Policy has also been created. Given the salience of Bay of Bengal for BIMSTEC, sustainable development of blue economy has been given a high priority. An Expert Group on Blue Economy has been set up to develop a Plan of Action on cooperation in developing Blue Economy in Bay of Bengal.

As a significant part of the population of the BIMSTEC member States is still below poverty line. Therefore, forging regional cooperation in poverty alleviation has also been given a priority.

BIMSTEC member States have in their developmental agenda given a high priority to mainstreaming women development and women-led development. It has therefore been decided to set up an Expert Group on women development to recommend measures across all the sectors.

I am looking forward to learning more about the vision, agenda and initiatives undertaken by other regional and sub-regional organizations. BIMSTEC is keen to share its experiences and best practices and learn from the experiences and best practices of the fellow organizations.

I wish to conclude by extending my gratitude to you all for your kind attention. Thank You! Namaskaar!