Remarks by the Secretary General of BIMSTEC at the Reception to Celebrate the 26th BIMSTEC Day

06 June 2023, BIMSTEC Secretariat, Dhaka

H.E. Mr. Shahriar Alam, Honourable State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh

Excellencies - Heads of Missions,

High Commissioners and Ambassadors of BIMSTEC Member States,

Officials of the Government of Bangladesh,

Friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum! A very good evening! And a very warm welcome to all of you to this BIMSTEC Day Reception!

My colleagues at the Secretariat and I are very happy to host the 26th BIMSTEC day - and we would like to convey our warmest felicitations to the Governments and people of the member states on this special occasion.

Your Excellency, Honourable State Minister -
A very special thank you to you, for taking time out from your busy schedule to be the Chief Guest of today’s celebration.

We are also delighted to have all the other Excellencies, High Commissioners, Ambassadors, Heads of Missions, Dignitaries and Friends with us today and we thank everyone for finding the time to be with us this evening.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Twenty-six years ago, on this very day – 6th of June 1997, the regional cooperation journey of BIMSTEC began with the signature of the Bangkok Declaration. Since then, BIMSTEC has been moving forward – making progress in several fields. With its strategic location and diverse membership comprising of South and Southeast Asian countries, BIMSTEC represents a rich tapestry of cultures, traditions and aspirations – providing a great opportunity to harness the collective potential of our seven nations.

BIMSTEC which began its regional cooperation journey on the 06th of June 1997 - has grown in strength over the years with its membership expanding from four to seven. BIMSTEC has also grown in stature – particularly with the adoption of the Charter last year - during the Fifth Summit held in Colombo. The Charter provides BIMSTEC the necessary legal personality to build more efficient working methods, strengthen its institutional framework and form meaningful partnerships within the region and beyond - to achieve BIMSTEC’s objectives.
Under the leadership of BIMSTEC’s current Chair, Thailand, “A BIMSTEC BANGKOK VISION 2030” has been initiated which is expected to be adopted by the Leaders during the upcoming 6th Summit. This Vision Document will serve as a guiding document, a guiding principle with common aspirations of all seven member countries - to make BIMSTEC an open, resilient, and a prosperous regional organization.

Friends,
The BIMSTEC region – comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand – is a dynamic region. It is home to over 1.6 billion people with a combined GDP of over 3.6 trillion US dollars. It is therefore, a region of tremendous potential.

However, the journey is not always smooth. Today, as the world passes through economic and political uncertainties, our countries are facing huge challenges in coping up with those uncertainties. We are still struggling to overcome the adverse effects suffered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which brought unprecedented disruptions to our economies and societies. The pandemic took a heavy toll on the health systems, economies and societies in the region. Climate Change and environmental issues are also challenges which require collective action.

Nonetheless, I believe, all crises and challenges also create opportunities; and BIMSTEC holds much promise as a platform for cooperation. With the disruption in global supply chains due to the COVID-19 pandemic, war and other uncertainties, the need and opportunity to create intra-regional trade has emerged as a “priority”. I hope that Member States will put in place the necessary trade facilitation measures as soon as possible to boost and increase intra-regional trade.

Improving Connectivity in all its aspects is an essential component of regional cooperation. In this context, I am happy that the BIMSTEC Maritime Cooperation Agreement was endorsed by the 19th Ministerial Meeting held in March this year, enabling its signature during the upcoming Sixth BIMSTEC Summit in Thailand. We are confident that this Agreement will facilitate access, boost trade and benefit the peoples of our member states.

On Energy, the three key components required for realizing inter-grid connection – the BIMSTEC Energy Master Plan; BIMSTEC Policy for Transmission of Electricity; and the Policy for Trade, Exchange of Electricity and Tariff Mechanism – are nearing completion. The BIMSTEC Energy Centre that will act as the Secretariat for BIMSTEC energy cooperation will also be formally inaugurated in India later this year.

Excellencies,
As BIMSTEC marks its twenty-sixth anniversary and approaches its Sixth Summit, BIMSTEC seeks to re-visit and re-examine its working methods to better serve the people of BIMSTEC through the appointment of an Eminent Persons Group that will put forth practical recommendations on the future directions of BIMSTEC. This, combined with the Bangkok Vision 2030 that the BIMSTEC Leaders will adopt at the next Summit, I am sure, will succeed in setting BIMSTEC on the course to achieving its full potential.

To conclude, on this important occasion, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Government of Thailand for its current stewardship of BIMSTEC, and to the Government of Bangladesh (upcoming Chair of BIMSTEC) for hosting the Secretariat and facilitating its smooth functioning. I wish all BIMSTEC Member States the strength and wisdom required to work collectively to uplift the lives of the people of our region.

Thank you, and I wish you all a pleasant evening.