Statement by H.E. Mr. Md. Shahriar Alam, MP, Hon’ble State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh

Chief Guest at the 26th BIMSTEC Day Reception at the BIMSTEC Secretariat on 06 June 2023

H. E. Mr. Tenzin Lekphell, Secretary General of BIMSTEC
Ambassadors and High Commissioners from BIMSTEC Member States
Ambassadors/High Commissioners/ representatives from the diplomatic corps
Senior Officials of the Government,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum and a very good evening to you all!

I am delighted to be here with you this evening for celebrating the momentous occasion of 26th BIMSTEC Day 2023 at the BIMSTEC Secretariat. I offer my heartfelt congratulations to the governments and citizens of the BIMSTEC member states on behalf of the government and the people of Bangladesh as well as on my own behalf. I would also like to extend my greetings to everyone present here for joining the celebrations. Your presence here tonight clearly indicates your support towards success of BIMSTEC as a regional organisation. The BIMSTEC Secretary General and his colleagues at the Secretariat deserve my warmest greetings on this occasion, as well as my gratitude for the lovely arrangements they made.

Distinguished Guests,

Regionalism is an age-old form of collective efforts for development among nations of the same region. Bangladesh has been an ardent supporter of regional cooperation since its inception for the wellbeing of the people. In South Asia and beyond, Bangladesh has led pioneering efforts in fostering regional collaborations. The iconic phrase "friendship to all, malice to none" from our founding father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, continues to serve as the basis of both regional and international collaboration. Following our independence, the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, first mooted the idea of collaborating with South Asian neighbors. Bangladesh now participates in a number of regional organizations and procedures. One of the most significant regional forums is BIMSTEC which consists of seven countries of the Bay of Bengal Region connecting South Asia and South East Asia. Bangladesh is one of the founding four members of BIMSTEC, which was established in 1997 as a result of the Bangkok Declaration. Once again, Bangabandhu's capable daughter Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was in charge of the Bangladesh government when the BIMSTEC regional conference was first established. As a mark of our commitment to the BIMSTEC forum, Bangladesh is currently home to the Permanent Secretariat in Dhaka. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina holds special affection for BIMSTEC regional forum. Pursuing BIMSTEC integration for rapid economic and social progress for the peoples of this region is
one of the top priorities of her Government’s Foreign Policy. We remained engaged with other member states in the advancement of all of its sectors of cooperation.

Excellencies,

The Bay of Bengal, which includes two dynamic regions of South Asia and South East Asia, has enormous potential for growth through significant multi-sectoral collaboration. With a GDP growth rate of above 6% on average, the region is home to 22% of the world's population. Only 7% of all trade between BIMSTEC member states is still conducted internally. Untapped potential exists for enormous economic, investment, trade, and other opportunities. Bangladesh, one of the organization's founding members, is still dedicated to promoting the development and well-being of our peoples through BIMSTEC-based cooperation.

The Bay of Bengal littoral nations that make up the BIMSTEC forum offer a dynamic setting for collaboration in the interests of shared development and prosperity of our peoples. The 26-year journey of the BIMSTEC forum is a considerable period of time. We are glad to share that the BIMSTEC process has made some significant strides recently. However, tremendous work needs to be done for BIMSTEC to be fully operational and result-oriented in order to meet its objectives. It's time to reflect on the past, review our commitment, and renew our plan.

Agreements and legal instruments are essential for the smooth functioning of the organization and for moving the process forward. I believe trade, investment and connectivity are a few sectors of cooperation that needs special mention. I sincerely urge member states to follow a quick course of action to complete the negotiation on the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area and sign the relevant legal documents so that concrete actions could be taken. At the same time, I would call upon the member states and the Secretariat to take rapid measures to implement the already concluded legal documents.

Excellencies,

There is a tremendous amount of untapped and unexplored potential for growth and development in the dynamic Bay of Bengal Region. The world is going through immense economic uncertainties at the moment. While our countries are trying to overcome the unprecedented consequences of the Covid-19, the Ukraine war and sanctions have brought new challenges for us. We need to enhance our cooperation to face these challenges. During the 5th BIMSTEC Summit, the leaders of seven member states adopted the BIMSTEC Charter, and also reconstituted sectors and sub-sectors which has provided BIMSTEC a solid footing and allowed a higher level of co-operation. I would urge all the stakeholders for strengthening and putting our partnership into action. The earliest conclusion of all constituent agreements and MoUs pertaining to the BIMSTEC FTA is required. Regular meetings at all levels are required. Only when all of these sectors show up with outcome, it will be a sustainable and peaceful Bay of Bengal region.
After graduation from LDC, Bangladesh and a few other BIMSTEC members will quickly lose the advantages they had as LDCs. In the BIMSTEC process, we must work together to develop alternatives for those advantages.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Through coordination, facilitation, and implementation of all decisions, the Secretariat has a significant role to play in any regional organization. We look forward to the Secretariat to be progressive and proactive while maintaining objectivity and neutrality. Through coordination, facilitation, and implementation of all decisions, the Secretariat has a significant role to play in any regional organization. My government will provide the Secretariat with its best possible support as the host nation. We appreciate the Secretary General's sincere efforts in supporting the Secretariat's operations, and we have been pleased with him. We'll be there for you.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We want BIMSTEC Process to be a most effective and result oriented one. We want BIMSTEC to deliver and contribute in fulfilling the dream of Bangabandhu who was an ardent proponent of regional cooperation and envisioned closer cooperation among the countries of the region for the socio-economic emancipation of the people.

On this auspicious occasion, once again, I call upon all BIMSTEC members and partners to work together for the benefit of the people of the region. I wish the BIMSTEC process all success.

I thank you all.

Long live the BIMSTEC Spirit.

Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu