STATEMENT BY H.E. LYONPO (DR.) TANDI DORJI, HON’BLE FOREIGN MINISTER, ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN
19th BIMSTEC MINISTERIAL MEETING
9 March 2023

Your Excellency, Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, Honourable Ministers, The Secretary General of BIMSTEC, Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen.

Kuzuzangpo!

1. I have the great honour and privilege to convey to this august gathering of the 19th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting the warm greetings and good wishes of His Majesty The King, Her Majesty the Queen and the people of Bhutan.

2. I would like to extend my delegation's sincere appreciation to the Royal Thai Government for their excellent preparations, and for successfully hosting this important Ministerial meeting.

3. I would also like to thank the Secretary General and his team at the Secretariat for undertaking all the excellent documentation and preparations for the meeting.

Excellencies,

4. On the eve of our 25th Anniversary, our region has emerged victorious from the gloom and doom of COVID-19. It is indeed a testament to our collective efforts as a region, and an indication that we must continue our journey together, supporting each other. Together we can overcome anything and everything!

Excellencies,

5. For the first time after 25 years of BIMSTEC’s founding, we have a Charter for our Organization. This is our first Ministerial Meeting after signing the Charter. I must congratulate all colleagues gathered here for your efforts in
make this a reality. I am confident that the Charter will reinforce the institutional fundamentals of BIMSTEC and take it forward for the benefit of all our countries.

6. As lead country for the Environment and Climate Change sector, we have convened the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Environment and Climate Change on 6 December 2022. Under this sector, Biodiversity conservation, waste management and climate change have been identified as potential areas for cooperation. These three areas are among the most pressing environmental challenges faced by all member states currently. With collective action, we hope to overcome these challenges and ensure a thriving biodiversity, achieve zero waste and attain climate resilient development and growth in the region.

7. We are working on updating and revising the Concept Paper and ‘Draft Plan of Action for Environment and Climate Change’. We will also incorporate ‘Mountain Economy’ as a sub-sector under the Environment and Climate Change Sector. Bhutan will share the revised concept paper and action plan at the earliest.

8. We have offered to host the Second meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Environment and Climate Change, and will convey the dates soon. We hope Member States will confirm their participation at the earliest to take the process further.

9. As part of the 25th Anniversary of BIMSTEC, the Secretariat organized a quiz competition hosted by Bhutan. Students from Seven Member States gathered in Thimphu to participate in the event. Among other things, the event helped establish contact, friendship, and understanding among our youth. I was pleased to be able to personally take part in the event.

Excellencies,

10. With the pandemic behind us, and as our region forges ahead with recovery and growth of our economies and peoples as one of the pressing needs of the moment, and coinciding with our region’s 25th Anniversary, I call upon all
Member States of our region to bring back our focus to the primary fundamental of our organization – **multi-sectoral technical and economic cooperation.**

11. Notwithstanding the fact that intra-regional trade in our region has increased from 3.3 per cent in 1997 to more than 7 per cent today, our region still remains one of the least integrated in terms of trade. I would therefore like to urge all Member States to maximize our efforts to finalize at the earliest, all agreements under the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement in order to stimulate trade, investment and growth in the region.

12. As a small landlocked country, Bhutan’s trade with the region is completely dependent on the availability of seamless transit facilities allowing for unhindered movement of goods to and from Bhutan. To realize our region’s full economic potential, we must ensure that landlocked countries who face natural barriers to trade are not left behind. Cost of trade is naturally higher for landlocked countries than transit and coastal States. This cost can only be lowered by addressing transportation and transit issues. Regional trade facilitation, including seamless transport and transit facilitation, is key to our region’s economic development and growth. We must all work together to ensure these.

**Excellencies,**

13. I would also like to congratulate our Senior Officials for their successful meeting yesterday and hard work in preparing for our meeting. The joint statement looks comprehensive and covers all areas under discussion. I look forward to adopting the Joint Statement later today. Lastly, I would like to conclude by reaffirming Bhutan’s unwavering commitment to the ideals and principles of BIMSTEC Cooperation.

**Thank you & Tashi Delek!**