

**BIMSTEC Day (6 June 2017)**  
**Address by Hon'ble Foreign Minister**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

First of all, let me extend a very warm welcome, and thank everyone for your kind presence in today's thousand butter lighting ceremony.

BIMSTEC – Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation – has been in existence for two decades now. As such, today is a historic day for BIMSTEC to celebrate.

This celebration is also an occasion to reflect on the progress achieved in the last 20 years. BIMSTEC has made good progress during this period.

This has been possible under the 14 areas of cooperation, such as Trade and Investment; Transport and Communications; Tourism; Energy; Technology; Fisheries; Poverty Alleviation; Agriculture; Cultural Cooperation; Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crimes; Environment and Disaster Management; Public Health; People-to-People contacts; and Climate Change, which enabled Member States to initiate activities and collaborate for collective pursuit of economic growth and social progress for the benefit of the people in the region.

I do not wish to dwell over the many initiatives in detail. Let me, however, mention that each of the seven Member States of BIMSTEC have taken the lead role in one or more areas of cooperation to take the activities and process forward. Several Committees, Working Groups, Expert Groups, Sub-groups, etc. have also been established for the same purpose. Likewise, the Summits, ministerial and technical level meetings, held on a regular basis, provide the necessary directives and drive in furthering cooperation, sharing knowledge and building capacity.

Let me add that a BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement (2004) and BIMSTEC Convention on Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug (2009) have been signed; and a “*BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study (BTILS)*” which is designed to help promote and improve transport infrastructure and logistic among the BIMSTEC countries has been completed.

Let me also inform the distinguished audience that Bhutan became member of BIMSTEC in 2004, and attaches great importance and takes active part in its proceedings and activities. We have successfully participated in two Summits and also hosted few meetings in the country.

Bhutan is the lead country for Cultural Cooperation, and will be hosting the *BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory* (BCIO).

**Excelencies, Ladies and gentlemen,**

BIMSTEC region is home to 1.5 billion people, about 22% of the global population with a common historical and cultural heritage. BIMSTEC also has a combined GDP of \$2.7 trillion. In the last five years, BIMSTEC Member States have been able to sustain an average economic growth rate of 6.5%.

Our two decades of regional experience has taught us that the path to achieving our common goal and aspirations is not without challenges and setbacks.

However, these challenges and setbacks must be overcome. In this, the narratives of past successes and progress achieved serve as the moral compass to guide us in drawing strength and inspiration along our path toward achieving regional prosperity and wellbeing in the long term.

In that regard, Bhutan, as responsible and committed member, will continue to engage and support BIMSTEC process in the years ahead.

In celebration, and in conclusion, let me acknowledge the contribution of BIMSTEC Secretariat led by an able Secretary General and his team, and all stakeholders of the Royal Government of Bhutan in support of BIMSTEC process and activities. Above all, let us commit to work in that direction with renewed passion and strength.

**Tashi Delek!**

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