

Statement
by Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Hon'ble Prime Minister,
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
at the Third BIMSTEC Summit in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar
4 March 2014

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr. Chairman, Hon'ble President U Thein Sein,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum and Good Morning to you all.

I have great pleasure to be in Myanmar for the Third Summit of the BIMSTEC. I have special pleasure in warmly congratulating President U Thein Sein for his astute leadership in moving forward the BIMSTEC agenda during the last five years. I also thank him, the government and the friendly people of Myanmar for the warm reception and hospitality accorded to me and to my delegation since our arrival in the beautiful city of Nay Pyi Taw.

Mr. Chairman,

In the past decades, neighboring countries in many regions have been establishing organizations to intensify economic integration for their mutual benefits. The BIMSTEC is one such regional organization established on 06 June 1997 with Bangladesh as a founding member and myself on my first term as Prime Minister. These organizations have with years evolved mechanisms for cooperation among themselves for the interest of their states and peoples.

Purposeful connectivity ensuring free movement of peoples, goods, and services have been found from experience as one factor vital for quicker development of member states, overall well being of their peoples, and closer regional integration. Therefore, soon after our past government took charge in 2009, I visited our immediate neighbors to develop such connectivity. It was received well by all as a realistic way to raise the quality of life of our peoples.

In this forum, our aspirations are similar as reflected in the recommendations contained in the 'BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistic Study'. The recommendations now need prioritizing with agreed timetable for their early implementation. The Study should also suggest innovative and practical modalities for faster implementation of the identified actions. The experience of other regions in this respect could be utilized in compiling the recommendations and the study.

The connectivity strategy and the resulting economic activities would greatly support the BIMSTEC “Poverty Plan of Action” for quickening the process of poverty alleviation in our region. This action plan contains some useful measures for drawing up regional initiatives. The BIMSTEC Poverty Alleviation Center in Dhaka could play a useful role in this as it is privy to the knowledge and experience of Bangladesh. I am happy that so far we have been successful in reducing poverty level from 40 % to 26 % in the last five years. Our aim is to have a poverty free Bangladesh by 2021.

A big contribution of meaningful connectivity would be the increase in trade among the BIMSTEC members. The “Framework Agreement on BIMSTEC FTA” signed a decade ago would help further increase the trade. The Trade Negotiating Committee needs to adopt the four inter-related Agreements as a package under the Framework Agreement and complete all its work by 2014. It would assist the next Trade and Economic Affairs Ministers Meeting in Dhaka with commitment and flexibility to wrap up the TNC’s work and move ahead to address the issues of non-tariff barriers and the flow of investment and finance, as part of wider economic cooperation.

The intensive economic activity generated at this time would obviously raise the demand for energy, which would pose a challenge for our countries to secure a steady supply of energy at affordable prices. We would need to adopt sustainable energy development programs as well as developing regional energy grids and energy markets. Our huge untapped energy potentials, particularly the hydro-power on bilateral or trilateral basis, would need to be developed for optimal utilization through collaborative projects. The recent experience of cross border power sharing between Bangladesh and India would help finalize plans covering these efforts.

To ensure unimpeded development, we should need to mobilize collective efforts to monitor, and take unified stand to seriously consider the adverse impacts of climate change. Global assessments indicate that natural disasters in our region would increase in frequency and intensity. A rise in 1 degree Celsius due to global warming would submerge a fifth of Bangladesh forcing 30 million people to become “climate migrants”. This was the reason why in the 64th UNGA and every year, thereafter, I have called for a legal framework to ensure social, cultural, and economic rehabilitation of climate migrants. Other BIMSTEC members may also face similar situation, and therefore, voice their support to our proposal.

Sustainable development and reduction of poverty also demands beneficial conservation, development and tapping of water resources in the region. This is also vital for agriculture and food security. Our countries are sometimes affected with production shortfall in key cereals. Modalities also need to be found for the sharing of water resources, especially of common rivers. As for example, Bangladesh and India is sharing the water of the River Ganges with the signing of the 30-year Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, with others to follow soon. BIMSTEC could also explore our potentials in fisheries, livestock and horticulture. For food security we need to:

- (a) develop intra-regional food support mechanism to help countries overcome short term difficulties;
- (b) explore ways for increased investments in the farm sector and towards development and transfer of appropriate, climate resilient technology to increase agriculture productivity in our countries;
- (c) facilitate innovative initiatives in priority areas of farm mechanization, innovative agriculture services, water productivity and farming.

Mr. Chairman,

The reality today is a globalized world where we need to work with collective strength and capabilities in utilizing our combined natural endowments for beneficial economic integration and shared prosperity. From BIMSTEC's initial six areas of cooperation in 1998, it has expanded to fourteen of which some are achieving notable progress, with others awaiting fresh impetus. The BIMSTEC needs to move forward with efforts based on mutual respect, trust, mutual and equitable sharing of benefits.

I am confident that the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat would generate the momentum necessary for the implementation of all our decisions and the agreed agenda. I am happy that Dhaka was chosen as its seat and I thank you all again for the decision. I assure you that it would receive all support from us for its operation and activities. We are also waiting to welcome the first Secretary-General in Dhaka. We thank too our friend Thailand for its continued valuable institutional support to the BIMSTEC.

At this stage, I would like to apprise you of a few indicators on our country's achievements during the last five years. Bangladesh, from 2009 to 2013, maintained a GDP Growth Rate of over 6 % with 50 million people joining the middle income group. Our export earnings in the period have increased by 107 %; remittances by 62 %; foreign currency reserve by 217 %; power capacity by 109 %. We are also on track in our MDGs. Thus, Bangladesh is often mentioned as a "Model of Economic Development".

In conclusion, I reiterate our government's total commitment to the BIMSTEC. It has the potential to move us all to our common goals. I see optimism in its vibrant role, to particularly help Bangladesh in fulfilling its "Vision 2021" of a middle income country, which is a step to our journey to becoming "Sonar Bangla" or "Golden Bangladesh" as envisioned by the Father of our Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

I call upon the fraternal members of the BIMSTEC to extend all cooperation in fulfilling our pledge to becoming a secure, stable and prosperous region where all our peoples would enjoy a life of dignity, security and peace.

I thank you.

Khoda Hafez.
Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.
