

Check against delivery



Statement by

His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa

President

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Third BIMSTEC Summit

Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar

4 March 2014

His Excellency Thein Sein, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Chairman of the Third BIMSTEC Summit

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

As we meet today, at the Third BIMSTEC Summit after a period of five years, it is timely to reflect on the Group's achievements, and deliberate to establish its future course. At the outset, I wish to record my deep appreciation of His Excellency Thein Sein who as the Chair of BIMSTEC steered the work of the Organization with skill. I thank Your Excellency and the Government of Myanmar for the warm and gracious hospitality extended to me and my delegation and on the excellent arrangements made for the Summit.

Mr. Chairman,

I am pleased to acknowledge that BIMSTEC has made significant strides in increasing cooperation among nations in the Bay of Bengal region. The key characteristic of our Organization has been the meeting of the 'Look West' policy of the ASEAN nations and the 'Look East' policy of their South Asian counterparts, thereby bridging two of the most dynamic regions in the world.

The achievements through regional cooperation in the political, economic and cultural spheres since the inception of BIMSTEC in 1997 are commendable, which provide encouragement to seek new avenues of cooperation. Though BIMSTEC nations have collaborated in many sectors, I believe there remains vast untapped potential. Our energies

must focus on this potential, as leaders representing one fifth of the world's population.

Mr. Chairman,

We may at times feel that progress of our Grouping has been slow. But, today we have the opportunity to look back and take stock of our achievements, analyze the shortcomings and seek ways and means of addressing them, for greater cooperation in the Region.

BIMSTEC is a relatively young regional Grouping, and sufficient time must be allowed to achieve its full capacity. It is my firm conviction that the consensus we reach at the present Summit, would contribute to further increasing collaboration and harnessing the capabilities of our collective existence.

Mr. Chairman,

My country, as a founder member, is committed to the BIMSTEC process. Sri Lanka as an active participant is the Lead Country in the Technology Sector and the Permanent Chair of the Trade Negotiating Committee, for a Free Trade Agreement. This Agreement, once finalized, will open new avenues to increase trade and economic cooperation in the region.

The theme for this Summit: "Partnership for Harmony and Prosperity," is timely. Joint efforts in the BIMSTEC region would complement the initiatives of member states, in achieving sustainable economic growth and social progress. In this regard, I recall the theme Sri Lanka selected for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Colombo three months ago, was "Growth with Equity; Inclusive Development."

That too, aimed at collectively addressing the main issues faced by a large section of people in the developing world.

Mr. Chairman,

It is encouraging to note that BIMSTEC has broadened its scope to many other areas of collaboration. When the entire world is compelled to deal with terrorism and trans-national crimes, cooperation on this issue has been continuing since 2004. As a country that had suffered from terrorism, for nearly three decades, we in Sri Lanka are acutely aware of its human and economic costs. Unfortunately, Sri Lanka's economy could not run at its true potential during those years. With the defeat of terrorism, the Sri Lankan economy has been consistently recording, a growth rate of seven percent.

Though terrorism is no more in our shores, we need to ensure that it would never raise its ugly head again. Eternal vigilance therefore is vital, particularly as terrorist organizations have extensive international networks. Undoubtedly, the cooperative spirit which exists within our Grouping on addressing this issue will continue. Terrorism, wherever in the world, in whatever form or manifestation, is a threat to the collective security of all nations.

Mr. Chairman,

Our resolve to establish the Organization's Permanent Secretariat in Dhaka, is a significant milestone in the BIMSTEC process. Sri Lanka thanks the Government of Bangladesh for hosting this Secretariat. I assure the Secretariat, Sri Lanka's fullest support and cooperation. With a permanent Secretariat, it would now be possible to pursue the targeted goals with more vigour and to take stock of the progress of the activities

carried out under BIMSTEC. Sri Lanka will support the Secretariat's efforts to further strengthening the activities under the priority areas of cooperation, to be better result oriented.

Mr. Chairman,

I am confident that the incoming Chair, Nepal, will continue to diligently guide our Group and further consolidate our partnership and collaboration in BIMSTEC.

While pledging Sri Lanka's unstinted cooperation in BIMSTEC activities, I wish the deliberations at this third BIMSTEC Summit, all success.

May the blessings of the Noble Triple Gem be with you!