

# **Statement by External Affairs Minister of India during the 14th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar**

March 03, 2014

Your Excellency, the Foreign Minister of Myanmar

My fellow Foreign Ministers

Distinguished delegates

I would, at the outset, wish to express my deep gratitude to our host, the Foreign Minister of Myanmar and the Myanmar government for making such excellent arrangements for the BIMSTEC meetings and the warm hospitality extended to me and my delegation in this beautiful and modern city of Nay Pyi Taw.

Excellencies

BIMSTEC provides a unique link between South Asia and Southeast Asia bringing together 1.5 billion people, over 20% of the world population, and a combined GDP of over US\$ 2.5 trillion. In today's inter-linked and inter-dependent world, the commonalities between us provide opportunities to enhance our cooperation.

BIMSTEC is privileged to have a full and active membership committed to BIMSTEC priorities. On the eve of the 3rd Summit, we note with satisfaction the significant progress achieved in many of the priority areas of cooperation. Yet, much more needs to be done. We seek to consolidate our partnership and focus on building infrastructure and concrete projects for cooperation. I am delighted that we are establishing our Permanent Secretariat for BIMSTEC in Dhaka; this will greatly help in coordinating our efforts in an effective way.

To make BIMSTEC a vibrant regional entity, I wish to share with you a few thoughts about our future direction. Our organization should carry out a broad review of our activities and focus on a limited number of priority areas. Areas identified should have the potential for producing concrete results and strengthen our common vision for the region and for BIMSTEC. We need to identify well-defined projects with tangible results relevant to the needs of our peoples. We need to step up implementation through clear conceptualization and adequate funding. We should take advantage of the experiences of member countries to address the challenges of development and improve the livelihood of our peoples. Finally, as BIMSTEC is a consensus driven process, frequent and regular interaction between stakeholders will help in implementing our various initiatives.

Excellencies

Today, I wish to highlight the five key areas for regional cooperation that need emphasis and attention of BIMSTEC members:

First, connectivity. The region we inhabit still has a deficiency of infrastructure to provide efficiencies in our economies and to enhance mutually beneficial exchanges. Our priority should be to provide connectivity, both physical and institutional such that our region can forge ahead in the new era. I am happy that ADB has done the first phase of report on updating and enhancement of BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistic Study (BTILS). I am happy that our experts will be meeting between March and June this year to finalize a short list of projects for implementation. We need to proceed on this with urgency such that we can build for ourselves the transport infrastructure and cooperate on policy parameters to enhance efficiency in the region. I see no reason why we should not have seamless connectivity between the North East of India and Myanmar and Thailand on one side and with Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal on the other. We need to revive coastal shipping arrangements and inter-modal transport, practices that had flourished in the past, such that goods and services can flow easily.

Second, economic cooperation. The strategic imperative of our times is to bring out economic development, promote technology and innovation and provide a better livelihood to our peoples. Our negotiators have been working on a BIMSTEC FTA, and have made significant progress. We should conclude this at the earliest such that the people of the region can benefit from each other. In the interim, we also need to promote customs cooperation, conclude a dispute resolution mechanism and encourage business-to-business links will promote trade and investment in the region.

Third, energy. The engine of economic development is energy. Our region is blessed with natural resources and cooperation on use of gas, hydro power and renewable energy sources, grid interconnections and coordination on energy policy will enable mutually beneficial development. Our experts need to evolve regional energy policies. The BIMSTEC Energy Centre being established in Bengaluru can play an important role in this endeavour.

Fourth, security. We still live in a difficult neighbourhood with the incidence of terrorism and other transnational crimes. I am happy that our group has made significant advances in building the legal architecture to combat such a menace and developed functional cooperation between our agencies. The Convention on Combating Terrorism, signed in 2009, is awaiting ratification in several countries. The Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters has been finalized and is ready for signature. We should encourage closer cooperation in this area as a peaceful environment is a pre-requisite for a harmonious society and for progress and prosperity.

Fifth, people-to-people links. This is the strongest link as it brings together our cultural experiences, promotes tourism, youth exchanges and forms and abiding connection. We have a wealth of riches in our historical sites, natural parks and societies which can promote the flow of people across the borders. Such tourism will build closer bonds and promote a cooperative spirit among the people. The experience of the Network of Think Tanks started by RIS is an important contribution in the academic sphere.

Excellencies,

India is proud to be a member of BIMSTEC with such worthy partners. We are committed to developing our organization and promoting a strategic perspective to our common efforts such that our region and our peoples can take advantage of the opportunities in this new century. I have no doubt that with our joint efforts we shall create a harmonious and prosperous future.

Thank you.