

PM's Statement at the BIMSTEC Summit [13 November 2008]
Joint Press Conference

November 13, 2008

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen of the press,

We have just concluded the second BIMSTEC Summit. This is a very special occasion. The Summit has taken place four years after the first Summit in Thailand. It marks the completion of ten years of the creation of BIMSTEC in 1997.

Ten Ministerial meetings of BIMSTEC have taken place so far. In addition, meetings at Senior Officials level are held twice a year, and there is a BIMSTEC Working Group based in Thailand which meets every month.

BIMSTEC is the bridge between South and South-East Asia.

There is far greater regional and sub-regional integration in Asia than was the case when BIMSTEC was created in 1997.

We all belong to the Bay of Bengal community. Nature and geography have bound us together by land and by water. We are all developing countries faced with similar challenges. BIMSTEC is therefore an idea whose time has come.

It is against this background that we have held very positive and forward-looking discussions today. We were unanimous that the commonalities between us provide vast opportunities to enhance cooperation and connectivity between us.

We agreed to focus on enhancing our rail, road, air and shipping links to further promote people-to-people contacts and to further facilitate cultural exchange, business and tourism flows.

The leaders expressed their satisfaction at the progress that has been made in the negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement in trade in goods and called for their early conclusion. They welcomed the establishment of the Centres for Energy and

Weather and Climate in India and the BIMSTEC Cultural Observatory in Bhutan. They expressed concern at the threat which terrorism poses to our region.

The Retreat provided us a useful opportunity to exchange views on several pressing issues such as the international financial crisis, energy security, food security and climate change. There was a common desire among all leaders to work together to meet these challenges.

The Summit has given a strong political impetus to the strengthening of our cooperation in the identified thirteen areas. We have agreed to direct our officials to focus on concrete outcomes and implementation of decisions that have been reached.

I would like to personally thank the leaders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand for their active contribution in making this Summit a success. Their guidance and suggestions helped to enrich our discussions and to chart out a new roadmap for BIMSTEC.
