

as of 03 March 2014

Your Excellency, U Thein Sein, *President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Chairman of BIMSTEC*,

Excellencies,

Secretary General of BIMSTEC,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentleman,

*MINGALABAR.....Kuzuzangpo la.*

It is a great pleasure for me to be here in the beautiful modern city of Nay Pyi Taw. To Your Excellencies gathered here today and the people of Myanmar I bring warm greetings from His Majesty the King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, and from the Government and people of Bhutan.

To begin with allow me to express my deep appreciation to the Government of Myanmar for the warm reception and hospitality being extended to me and my delegation, and for the excellent manner with which it has guided the work of our organization since the last Summit. May I also express our appreciation for the useful work done by our Ministers and Senior Officials in preparation for this Summit.

I am confident, Mr. Chairman, that under your able stewardship this Summit will not only further consolidate the progress achieved thus far, but also yield tangible results for our common interests and forge closer ties among the people of our region.

I also congratulate H.E. Ambassador Sumith Nakandala on his appointment as the first Secretary General of BIMSTEC. I assure him of Bhutan's full support and cooperation as he takes on his important responsibilities.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Given the potential impact on all our peoples, Bhutan attaches high importance to the purposes and principles of BIMSTEC. Our Association provides a unique platform for two geographically contiguous sub-regions of South Asia and South East Asia to engage in mutually beneficial cooperation. We must work in earnest in a spirit of shared responsibility and partnership to seize opportunities and capitalize on the enormous potential of our sub-regions. In this context, the hosting of the Summit here in Myanmar is significant as it is the geographical link between South Asia and South East Asia.

Indeed, this Summit is an opportunity for us to increase the momentum and expand the scope of our cooperation.

Since the inception of BIMSTEC, we have taken numerous initiatives to realize the founding objectives and principles of our Association as encapsulated in the "Bangkok Declaration". The establishment of the Permanent Secretariat and the appointment of the first Secretary General of our Association are important milestones to institutionalize and deepen our engagement. And in this regard, we welcome the signing of the "Memorandum of Association on the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat".

Likewise, we welcome the signing of the "Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory and the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission", and the "Memorandum of Association on the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Weather and Climate Centre". I am confident that these Centers will facilitate greater cooperation in the areas of culture and disaster reduction and management.

**Mr. Chairman,**

With 1.5 billion people, abundant natural resources and growing economies, a well thought-out and effectively implemented cooperation under BIMSTEC has the potential of occupying a significant spot on the global stage.

I am sure that at some point of time all of us have encountered disenchantment at the slow pace of our integration process, and in some quarters, apprehension that we may be heading nowhere. Much of this commentary has been characterized by whether we have been sufficiently enthusiastic and practically determined to achieve the goals which we have set. For example, while economic integration and trade facilitation remains a priority, the modalities to implement a Framework Agreement on the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area (FTA) has not yet come to fruition.

Similarly connectivity, both in terms of physical as well as through communication linkages is vital to achieve transformative endogenous growth and competitiveness in the economies of the BIMSTEC region. In this context, Bhutan welcomes the BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure Logistics Study (BTILS) prepared by ADB. While the BTILS holds enormous promises and potentials for our economies, progress on this initiative has been slow. With the up-dating of the BTILS having now been initiated by the ADB, I am hopeful that we

now stand poised to implement the recommendations for the benefit of our people.

Further despite several initiatives for the transformation of agriculture, we have not progressed nearly as quickly as we should have in implementing and realizing its objectives. We are all agrarian countries with agricultural production, consumption and related trade having long been key contributors of our economies. With more than two-thirds of our poor living in rural areas and depending directly or indirectly on agriculture for livelihood, promotion of agriculture would serve to dramatically reduce rural poverty and also enhance our food security. We must, therefore, focus immediately on how to rapidly increase investment in this vital sector.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The establishment of BIMSTEC is not just a step towards enhancing the economic interaction and linkages between SAARC and ASEAN. It symbolizes a commitment by our countries to stand in solidarity as we tackle the numerous socio-economic challenges facing the region. Additionally, BIMSTEC will enhance the bonds of friendship between our countries by facilitating and promoting interaction, awareness and understanding among our people who are the real drives of the integration process.

Drugs, terrorism and transnational crime pose serious threats to the sovereignty, security and economic viability of our region. Therefore, cooperation in law enforcement must remain an important focus as this transnational "business" continues to infiltrate every aspect of the lives of our people and the well being of our societies.

The demand for energy has seen a drastic rise in the past century and it is growing at alarming proportions. The transition from fossil fuel to alternative green energies seem promising and the case for rapid investment in alternative and renewable energy sources is a compelling one. If we were to harness our region's collective energy potential from renewable sources such as hydro, solar and wind the impact on our balance of payments, competitiveness in our productive sector, cost of living, and benefit to the environment would be immeasurable.

Information Communication Technology or ICT must be tapped as a critical driver of our cooperation both as an enabler and an all-encompassing force. It presents limitless opportunities for countries with limited natural resources. ICT is not about technology. It is about people. It is about changing the way we do things and building a knowledge society that we, in Bhutan, interpret as the evolution of an intelligent society that learns to

learn. We must take bolder and more innovative steps so that the only limit is, indeed, our imagination.

As the forces of modernization and globalization bring about rapid changes it is imperative that we make every effort to ensure that our national and regional identity is not swallowed up by the forces of change. Culture is the essence of our national and regional identities, drawing on past, present and future traditions. Culture is an important priority for Bhutan, a value inspired by our enlightened fourth Monarch, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk, who offered the concept of Gross National Happiness as a path for wholesome development. We are, therefore, happy to be the lead country for cultural cooperation.

**Mr. Chairman,**

I have highlighted just a few key sectors and buildings blocks that are critical for the rapid regional transformation that we all desire.

Indeed, it may be useful to reflect more deeply on the path we have travelled since the Bangkok declaration in 1997, which challenged us to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of our people, the overarching objective being to create an enabling

environment for rapid economic growth of our sub-region through the promotion of trade, investment and services.

While we have also witnessed, in practical ways, the benefits of increased functional cooperation in several important sectors such as tourism, public health, environment, disaster management and poverty alleviation among others, there is no doubt that success must be defined by progress on the economic front. If we continue to move too slowly along the path of economic transformation we only stand to lose and we will be unable to realize the dreams and aspirations of our people by building a strong, viable and prosperous BIMSTEC community.

As we endeavour to realize the aims and objectives of our association, and while we hasten with the urgent transformative actions that are so critically needed by our region if we are to remain apace and compete in today's world, we must reflect and ask ourselves a simple question, "Are we sufficiently inspired to complete this journey"?

In answering this question we must ensure that the confidence reposed in us by our people as leaders of the region is not lost. We must synthesize approaches to a common agenda and communicate more effectively so that the values of this



Association resonate with our mandate. Representing a country that is small and vulnerable but dares to dream big dreams I, personally, remain convinced we can and will complete this journey together.

In closing, I would like to reaffirm Bhutan's full support and commitment to the purposes and principles of BIMSTEC.

Thank you and Tashi Delek.