

Opening Remarks by Hon. Ms. Pampha Bhusal, Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation of Nepal, at the Third BIMSTEC Energy Ministers' Meeting held in virtual mode from Kathmandu on 20 April 2022

Honourable Ministers
Secretaries and Senior Officials of the Member States
Secretary General of BIMSTEC
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

Namaskar and warm greetings from Kathmandu!

I am delighted to welcome Your Excellencies and distinguished delegates from the BIMSTEC Member States to this Third BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting on Energy being held from Kathmandu through this virtual platform.

It would have been a great pleasure for me to welcome Your Excellencies in Kathmandu and connect in-person with you. However, due to the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficult times we are living in, we could not conduct the meeting physically this time.

I appreciate the Senior Officials for their extensive deliberations in yesterday's meeting. I expect that this meeting will also continue the same spirit and reach a meaningful outcome.

I take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to the Secretary General His Excellency Tenzin Lekphell and his team at the BIMSTEC Secretariat for their meticulous preparatory work for today's meeting.

Excellencies,

This meeting has been taking place at a crucial juncture in the life of BIMSTEC.

The historic Fifth Summit of the now-25-year-old BIMSTEC has been recently concluded with a solid footing. The Summit has achieved a milestone by adopting the BIMSTEC Charter and some other policy instruments along with the rationalization of sectors and sub-sectors of cooperation.

When we talk about the sectors and sub-sectors of cooperation, energy has always remained an important priority area in the BIMSTEC process. And, consistent efforts have been made to promote energy cooperation in the region.

The Memorandum of Understanding for the Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection signed during the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit held in Kathmandu in 2018 was an important recent achievement.

BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Master Plan Study, to be conducted with the technical support from ADB is expected, to identify different transmission projects to be built in the matching timeframes with the Power generation projects planned in different BIMSTEC countries. A rigorously thought-out Plan will be critical to facilitate the intra-regional power trade and enhanced energy cooperation.

A deeper level of energy cooperation can be realized including through an early establishment of an interconnected grid infrastructure system in the BIMSTEC region.

Energy trade is an important issue. It can minimize both the risks of power waste and power shortage in our countries.

However, most of the energy trade in our region is bilateral in nature. The existing intra-regional energy trade is limited to electricity and petroleum products.

To diversify this trade, we must chart out short, medium, and longer-term power trading projects that can gradually shift ensure transition to renewable energy production with emphasis on achieving the goals of a carbon-neutral economy.

The establishment of BIMSTEC Energy Centre was envisaged during the First BIMSTEC Energy Ministerial Meeting held in India in 2005. It is a matter of satisfaction that it is on the verge of being operationalized.

I believe that it can coordinate, facilitate, and strengthen cooperation in the energy sector in our region by promoting experience sharing, capacity building, and best practices. The Center would be instrumental in realizing seamless power connections in our region.

Distinguished Delegates,

The BIMSTEC region is well-endowed with natural sources of energy, particularly renewable and clean energy sources. Despite the abundance of primary energy resources for electricity generation and renewable energy, we are still lagging behind in fully utilizing the potentials.

Nepal has huge hydropower potentials. Our hydropower export to the Member States of the BIMSTEC will benefit not only Nepal but also the entire region for reducing non-renewable energy generation and providing sustainability to the system.

Against this context, however, we have witnessed that our region has been scrambling for energy security. Besides this, in the absence of adequate cross-border interconnection, indigenous and locally available energy sources and the best practices are yet to be explored and shared among the Member States.

It is evident that the energy crisis touches every sector and aspect of our life; hence optimal priority should be given to meeting our energy needs.

The 3E nexus between energy, environment and economy is remarkably vital for achieving sustainable economic growth in the BIMSTEC region. Over the past decades, we have been conventionally following the course of fossil fuel-based energy production and consumption. This trend needs to be changed as much as possible since it has enormously added stress on our environment.

We must mobilize adequate financing for energy and promote technology transfer in our region. We need to ensure that our future generation will not suffer due to our inaction on this agenda.

In line with the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030, we need to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels to ensure a low-carbon and climate-resilient growth trajectory. Affordable, renewable, and sustainable energy solutions should be explored without delay.

Before I conclude, I wish to underline that enhanced inter-linkages among our economies in all aspects can advance regional cooperation in a true spirit.

Let us collectively commit to energy security. We must acknowledge that BIMSTEC's future is also the future of around 1.7 billion. Therefore, trust building among us, clarity on our future endeavors and sincerity of purpose for addressing the critical issues facing the energy sector in BIMSTEC are very much critical.

I am confident our deliberations today will add value to attaining these noble aspirations and contribute to enhancing energy cooperation in the BIMSTEC region.

Once again, I welcome you all to this meeting and thank you for your attention.