77th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP): “Building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific.”
26-29 April 2021 (Virtual)

Honorable Presidents, Honorable Prime Ministers;

Honorable Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of UN-ESCAP;

Representatives of the Members, Associate Members, Observer Organizations, Intergovernmental and Non-governmental Organizations of the UN-ESCAP;

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen;

01. It is indeed a great honor for me to join the 77th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific being held virtually under the theme “Building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific.” The theme of ESCAP’s current Session could not be more relevant, as the world is currently reeling from the crisis brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.

02. BIMSTEC, the organization I represent, brings together a large part of South Asia and a significant portion of Southeast Asia. In the context of our cooperation with the United Nations, BIMSTEC has been regularly engaging with UN-ESCAP and sharing our experiences and good practices in the areas of mutual interests as mandated by the Member States.

03. Like all other countries, the BIMSTEC Member States attach utmost importance to the recovery and rehabilitation process posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The BIMSTEC Member States, at the recent 17th Ministerial Meeting held on 01 April 2021, reiterated their commitment to strengthen cooperation on public health issues in the Bay of Bengal Region and recognized the need to strengthen regional capacity on public health through collaborative research, training of health care personnel and development of regional value chains for pharmaceutical industries. The Ministerial Meeting also underlined the need for coordination and cooperation with International Organizations to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with these strong commitments, we agreed to establish an Expert Group on Public Health and build a stronger collaboration among the traditional medicine experts in finding ways to combat COVID-19.
Distinguished Delegates,

04. In our efforts to build back better, it is important to learn from good examples of collaboration and cooperation in ensuring that no one is left behind in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Timely exchange of information and sharing of best practices would be necessary in responding to the current pandemic. Technology, as we have seen over the past year, plays a huge part in fighting against the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Pooling resources and expertise in managing such crises is getting more serious and urgent. The pandemic does not differentiate between the rich and the poor nor between nationalities or color. We all know that no single country can be free of the pandemic if the rest of the world is not free from it. Therefore, concerted efforts to work together to respond to these challenges need to be given due priority and attention. It has now become even more critical to share vital resources, skills, knowledge and speed up the management and recovery process for the whole of humanity.

05. Coordination and partnership in vaccine production, is beginning to be seen as “the prime feature” to address this global concern. The issue of TRIPS waiver to Covid-19 vaccines at the WTO may be considered “important” in recovering the world from Covid-19. Therefore, we would like to encourage all stakeholders to strengthen and take forward “urgently” the multilateral partnership arrangements such as Access to Covid-19 Tools Accelerator and the Covid-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility.

06. I wish to conclude by saying that strengthening the regional organizations and cooperation “is paramount” and “the way forward” to materialize the process of achieving the SDGs and in tackling Covid-19 recovery. From our part, the BIMSTEC Secretariat will closely follow up on the development of the Covid-19 pandemic with our available resources and will continue to make suitable recommendations to the BIMSTEC Member States and beyond. Finally, I wish to reiterate that BIMSTEC remains “committed” to supporting regional efforts for building back better from COVID-19 and other crises.

Thank you.