

**Shri Rajnath Singh inaugurates the First BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise****Shri Rajnath Singh inaugurates the First BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise**

The Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh inaugurated the four-day first Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation Disaster Management Exercise (BIMSTEC DMEx-2017) here today. The Exercise is being conducted by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) as the lead agency from October 10-13, 2017 in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR). At the 17th BIMSTEC Senior Officials Meeting held in Kathmandu, Nepal on February 7, 2017, it was decided that India would organize the first annual Disaster Management Exercise for the region.

Addressing on the occasion, Shri Rajnath Singh extended warm greetings to all delegates from BIMSTEC nations that have come together to participate in this joint exercise. He said that their presence for this exercise represents their governments' commitment to regional co-operation in the area of disaster risk management.

Expressing concern over the disasters, the Home Minister said, in the recent monsoon season, floods and landslides have affected millions of people across almost all the BIMSTEC countries. This is yet another reminder of the importance of improving our disaster preparedness, he emphasised. Shri Rajnath Singh said that over the period 1996 to 2015, the BIMSTEC countries have lost 317,000 lives to disasters. In these disasters more than 16 million people in BIMSTEC countries have lost their homes and economic losses are also high and escalating, he further added. He said, in terms of number of extreme weather events – floods, droughts, heat waves and cyclones – the future is not going to be any better and the frequency and intensity of such events is likely to rise in view of the climate change. However, if we make our communities, our towns and villages, and our economic activities resilient, we can reduce the losses, the Home Minister said. He said that the improved disaster preparedness is a corner stone of this effort and in this direction, all the BIMSTEC nations have made significant progress over the last two decades. Highlighting the progress of various nations, he said that the cyclone preparedness programme of Bangladesh is recognized as a global best practice and the last mile connectivity of Tsunami early warning system in Thailand has significantly improved preparedness in coastal areas.

Speaking on India's efforts in this direction, Shri Rajnath Singh said that we are making concerted efforts to reduce preventable deaths and other losses and are also analyzing

the patterns of disaster mortality and taking focused steps. He said that India's effective handling of Phailin and Hudhud in the recent past is the direct outcome of over a decade of policy initiatives and enhancement of early warning capabilities, advance preparation, training and capacity development.

He expressed hope that over next few days besides focusing on joint exercise, delegations will have opportunity to share their country's experience. He said that success of this joint exercise will depend on not only the work that will be done over next few days but also follow-up work after the exercise.

The Home Minister said that over a period of time we need to use exercises to develop a pool of BIMSTEC disaster responders spread across all participating nations. These building blocks will ensure that when need arises, we can mobilise an effective response and help each other in a timely manner. He expressed sincere belief that BIMSTEC nations need to join hands to mitigate disasters since they face problem of floods on a regular basis.

Shri Rajnath Singh said if the BIMSTEC member states start sharing the hydrological data of transnational rivers with downstream countries, it will certainly help the nations in risk reduction and better disaster preparedness. We need to build a consensus on regular sharing of hydrological data of transnational rivers, he emphasised.

Shri Rajnath Singh reiterated India's commitment to stand shoulder to shoulder with other BIMSTEC nations in achieving its common goals in reducing disaster losses and explore all possible avenues of collaboration. He said that India has established the Tsunami early Warning System for the Indian Ocean Rim Countries. We have deployed our National Disaster Response Force in other affected countries for response operations, he said. He informed that prior to BIMSTEC, India has hosted joint bilateral exercises with SAARC countries and also hosted a joint meeting on disaster risk management of all the BRICS nations. Last year we hosted the Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction, he said. Shri Rajnath Singh said that in May this year India launched South Asia Geostationary Communication Satellite that will improve communication, weather forecasting, etc. He assured that India will work with the same level of commitment under BIMSTEC and is indeed looking forward to moving hand in hand with the BIMSTEC nations. He thanked BIMSTEC country delegations for coming to India for this joint exercise.

BIMSTEC Secretary General, M Shahidul Islam said that it is a great honour and privilege for him to be present at the first disaster management exercise. He expressed happiness at the fact that this exercise is being organised when BIMSTEC is completing 20 years of its formation this year and this is the reflection of true spirit of regional cooperation. He said that disaster management is of high priority because Bay of Bengal region is one of the most disaster prone areas of the world and has witnessed many disasters in the recent past. He expressed concern that during disasters, apart from human loss, economic loss is also huge which affects the GDP of the country. He said that we have little control over natural calamities, so we need to focus on disaster risk reduction. We need to learn from each other and our past experiences, he added. He emphasised that coordination and quick response must go hand in hand. He further said that various structural and non-structural systems have been put in place which has reduced the human loss. The Secretary General also said that people to people contact is very important along with institutional framework. He said that this exercise is just a beginning for a larger cooperation.

During his welcome address, Shri Sanjay Kumar, DG, NDRF said that the first phase comprising a Preparatory Meeting was held in Delhi NCR on August 8-9, 2017, during which the modalities for this exercise were discussed. He said that this exercise will provide a platform to member countries to share best practices and coordination for disaster management among BIMSTEC nations. This is an opportunity to review and discuss the disaster management plans, he added. He said that this exercise will facilitate the regional cooperation for effective disaster response. The disasters cannot be prevented, but certainly be managed, Shri Kumar said. He also emphasised on integration of latest technology in this regard.

The Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, Ms Preeti Saran said that BIMSTEC region has over one fifth of world's population and development of BIMSTEC countries is crucial for the development of world as a whole. She said that regional cooperation under BIMSTEC also spurs the development of North East region. She said that sharing information, joint action and capacity building are important and this exercise is a step in this direction.

Delegation and response teams of all seven BIMSTEC nations i.e. – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand were present during the session. Representatives from Embassies/High Commission of BIMSTEC nations in Delhi, MHA, MEA, NDMA, NIDM, NDRF, SDRF, senior officers of CAPFs and state representatives

were also present. Over 150 delegates of BIMSTEC member nations are participating in this event.

During the four-day exercise, the delegates from the member nations will share their experiences in the varied fields of disaster, training and its mitigation. Various events during the exercise include a Table Top Exercise after the inaugural session to provide participants with an opportunity to review and discuss disaster response plans and sharing of best practices of one nation with the other. Other exercises such as Joint Field Training Exercise on earthquake disaster at Ghaziabad, Joint Field Training Exercise on Flood Rescue at Wazirabad will also be conducted.

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