

**Opening Remarks by Dr. Myint Htwe, Union Minister for Health and Sports at the
opening ceremony of Second Meeting of BIMSTEC Task Force Members on
Traditional Medicine (BTFTM)**

M Gallery Hotel, Nay Pyi Taw

24th January, 2019

- Good morning, Mingalar Par,
- Dear Task Force members for BIMSTEC countries, secretariat of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic cooperation,
- Deputy Minister, Directors-General, Deputy Directors-General, senior officials who are here attending the opening session of the second meeting of the BIMSTEC Task Force Members,
- It is my pleasure and honor to deliver the opening remarks at the second meeting of BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine in Myanmar, and we are proud to host this meeting.
- On behalf of the Ministry of Health and Sports, I would like to convey our warm greetings to the BIMSTEC Task Force members on Traditional Medicine.
- I am sure that this Task Force meeting is a very good platform or medium to share good experiences in the field of Traditional Medicine. It is somewhat like a learning process as well to all of us.
- Traditional Medicine is a fast-developing discipline and we have many areas that we need to be explored further.
- It is important that we need to apply state-of-the-art approaches or innovative methods to improve the traditional medicine domain.

- We should also do in a scientific manner to generate newer ideas in the whole spectrum of Traditional Medicine domain.
- Myanmar is also striving hard along this direction. It is important that the concerned governments, ministries or departments or institutions must provide every opportunity and give support to Traditional Medicine practitioners.
- While all of us are gearing towards improvements in the field of Traditional Medicine, this BIMSTEC meeting is an excellent conduit to make it happen or achieve or reach immediate goal as well as our ultimate goal in the domain of Traditional Medicine.
- All of us, therefore, should make the most out of this meeting, in addition to contributing valuable advice and suggestions.
- Here, I am very proud to say is in just in 2-hour time our parliament is going to approve the Traditional Medicine Council Law for Myanmar.
- Like Medical Council Law is important for Medical doctors, this Traditional Medicine Council Law is crucial for the domain of Traditional Medicine. It is somewhat like a stem of the big tree where we can not only rely on but also it will give us many guiding principles like branches, leaves and flowers coming out from the tree in order to put the domain of Traditional Medicine to great heights.
- Like in many countries we have –
 - Traditional Medicine Associations and its branches
 - Department of Traditional Medicine
 - Associations of producers of Traditional Medicinal Products / Drugs

- University of Traditional Medicine and its faculty members
- Technical Advisory Group on Traditional Medicine etc.,
- All these entities, like in BIMSTEC countries, should work very closely and in tandem and most importantly, helping and supporting each other.
- Through this task force, we should strengthen the personal networks as well as institutional networks in the field of Traditional Medicine for conducting many joint activities, research projects and exploratory works.
- One area which I should urge you to exchange experience and sharing of knowledge is in the field of Traditional Medicine research especially research findings in BIMSTEC countries.
- I would personally request the secretariat of BIMSTEC to give special attention on this aspect.
- I would like to have more multi-centric or collaborative research in Traditional Medicine among BIMSTEC countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar.
- BIMSTEC secretariat could serve as a hub for making it happen.
- Conducting Traditional Medicine research is one of the essential activities, if we really want to promote and expand the knowledge horizon and enlarge and strengthen the knowledge base.
- We should even think of developing or updating a Traditional Medicine Research Registry and Traditional Medicine Research Information System or research network where Traditional Medicine professionals can view and study the

research projects being carried out in BIMSTEC countries.

- This will be very useful for students studying for Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees.
- It would, in fact, be a gold mine for them to be able to extract whatever information they require in their pursuit for higher degrees.
- I was informed that you will be discussing and deliberating on –
- Protection of genetic resources associated with Traditional Medicine knowledge
- Intellectual Properties Rights (IPR) for Traditional Medicine
- These two topics are really important for our country as our ancestors who had formulated effective Traditional Medicine but had no idea of doing IPR registration, patent rights and related matters.
- We have many effective Traditional Medicine and Traditional Medicine products which we did not submit for patent rights or patent licensing.
- Traditional medicine had been in existence in Myanmar for centuries since the dynasties of many kingdoms in Myanmar.
- I have to admit that one big issue which is not up to the mark or to our satisfaction in research in traditional medicine.
- We are making earnest effort so that Traditional Medicine Research is deeply rooted in our country.
- Currently, MoHS is promoting traditional medicine professionals to conduct research especially to know the efficacy, safety (untoward side effects) of traditional medicine and traditional medicine products.

- We are providing sufficient funding support to conduct research in Traditional Medicine as well.
- The research unit will soon be formed in the University of Traditional Medicine and MoHS will render a full helping hand on this.
- I am also sending my faculty members of University of Traditional Medicine to nearby countries or BIMSTEC countries as study tour visits through WHO funding.
- Traditional medicine without research will lead to nowhere or somewhat like ship without a rudder or compass.
- Having said that, we are promoting research in traditional medicine as a matter of top priority for conducting clinical research, herbal research, pharmacological research, many knowledge, attitude and practice of the population in terms of use of traditional medicine.
- Here I would request our BIMSTEC secretariat to help develop a strong research system in traditional medicine in our country and beyond.
- Myanmar is currently promoting activities to ensure safety, efficacy and quality of traditional medicine practices and traditional medicine products and I will continue to do so during my tenure in MoHS.
- MOHS had formed Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Traditional Medicine. This group will serve as a think tank for promoting traditional medicine from all perspectives in the coming months and years.
- All of us are aware that multi-pronged and multi-sectoral cooperation and coordination is required to promote Traditional Medicine effectively.

- Several specialists such as pharmacologists, pharmacists, laboratory specialists, researchers, clinical trial specialists, epidemiologists, ethicists, agricultural experts, botanists, physiologists, etc. must work closely if we really want to promote traditional medicine on a long term basis.
- Coordination among these disciplines is crucial and it would be a challenging task to make it happen. I will do my best to facilitate this collaboration.
- I will leave no stone unturned to do this with the spirit of mutual understanding, respect and collaboration.
- Harmonization of pharmacopoeia in BIMSTEC countries is also an integral area that needs to be worked out and develop a roadmap or framework for implementation.
- It is also desirable that private public partnership in different sub domain of traditional medicine starting from growing of traditional medicine herbs to production of traditional medicine products or drugs be enhanced.
- Traditional medicine product development is one area where private public partnership must be enhanced without fail and as soon as possible with renewed momentum.
- We also need to conduct several symposia or seminars at the national as well as international level in between the regional BIMSTEC meetings.
- This can create or instill the beauty and usefulness of traditional medicine to the population at large and sort out any contentious issue to the extent possible.
- From technical perspective and also in the context of promoting traditional

medicine in the BIMSTEC countries, it's appreciated that the quality of background papers or working documents for this meeting is of very high quality.

- For that matter, I would like to sincerely congratulate the BIMSTEC secretariat for the work done.
- In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that we are not only proud to host the second meeting of Taskforce members of BIMSTEC countries but also it is a big catalyst for our traditional medicine professionals or serve as a stimulant for them to move in a big way in our roadmap or framework for development of traditional medicine in our country.
- Seventy percent of our populations are residing in rural areas where people are using many traditional medicines to cure commonly occurring diseases.
- It is the duty of the Department of Traditional Medicine / MoHS, to make sure those traditional medicine products / drugs used by them are safe and the quality must be of acceptable standard and ensure effectiveness.
- I am sure that the discussion points and newer ideas emanating out of this meeting would be very valuable for all the participating countries.
- Lastly, I wish that we have a very productive meeting and achieve its objectives satisfactorily.
- I also wish that you have a very pleasant stay in Myanmar.
- Thank you.