



Opening Statement

by

His Excellency Mr. Sok Chenda Sophea

Minister Attached to the Prime Minister

Minister in charge of the GMS Cooperation Programme

Kingdom of Cambodia

H.E. Ms. Zou Jiayi, Vice Minister of Finance, GMS Minister of the People's Republic of China, Chairwoman of the 24th GMS Ministerial Conference,

H.E. Mr. Ahmed M. Saeed, Vice President of Asian Development Bank, Co-Chair of the 24th GMS Ministerial Conference,

Fellow GMS Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to sincerely extend my acknowledgement and appreciation to the People's Republic of China and ADB colleagues for efforts in organizing virtually this 24th Greater Mekong Subregion Ministerial Conference under the theme "Pave the way to a more integrated, inclusive, sustainable and prosperous GMS" despite being disrupted by the global pandemic of Covid-19.

During this critical challenge, I also strongly believe that all GMS countries are very determined to overcome this challenge together to find effective ways to combat Covid-19 and strengthen the subregion's economic resilience.

The GMS Ministers are here to lay the groundwork for the next year Leaders' Summit, where the Heads of government from Cambodia, the People's Republic of China, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam gather every 3 years to review the progress that has been made in improving subregional cooperation as well as strengthening subregion's capacity to jointly address public health emergencies through a more competitive, sustainable, interconnected, integrated, prosperous, and community-driven approach. Indeed, our mission is to further wield the bonds that we have developed among

our nations since the GMS program was established in 1992 so as to take stock for the new normal transition and emerge better in the post-Covid-19 recovery.

A lot has happened along our mission on the way. We have witnessed economic growth, development of connectivity, great leaps in technological innovation and a other unprecedented challenges affecting our subregion including the Covid-19 pandemic and its economic impacts, climate change, trade wars, geopolitical rivalries, threats to multilateral free trade system and among others. However, the future looks promising and the resolve to succeed is strong. Our mission remains unchanged: strengthening integration, advancing growth, and promoting prosperity for the inclusive and sustainable GMS Community through economic cooperation and development. The hard working men and women on whose shoulders we stand today, are the promise of a bright tomorrow for us all. Our overriding challenge, as well, remains unchanged: get the job done by adapting more quickly and remaining flexible and responsive in the face of the pandemics.

A “Long-Term Strategic Framework for 2030” is on the agenda for this gathering and I remind you that 2030 is just over the horizon. There are many strategic vectors to be taken into account and long-term planning requires the rapid and efficient identification of priorities and powerful trends that will require assiduous attention. Regional supply chains, global value chains, downward trends in manufacturing, labour force management, trade and investment facilitation, logistic and transport streamlining, and cross-border economic cooperation are still in the list of our priorities for subregional cooperation.

Cambodia highly noted GMS resilience in the face of the global challenges and commended the GMS governments for their prompt, prudent, and proactive response to the pandemic, particularly GMS Covid-19 Response and Recovery Plan (2021-2023) to accelerate recovery from the economic downturn caused by Covid-19. Today’s MC also signals our unwavering commitment to enhance the spirit of community, connectivity, and competitiveness in the face of the pandemic and further promote subregional economic integration that can increase investment, facilitate trade, generate employment, and strengthen connectivity in the GMS. I strongly support for deeper dialogue and call for closer collaboration on policy discussion, information exchanges, knowledge sharing, business matching, and capacity building from development partners, private sector, business

community, academia, knowledge institutions, and other relevant stakeholders in contributing to the effective implementation of the GMS Long-Term Strategic Framework 2030. Together, we can make GMS an open and inclusive platform through this endeavor.

Budget constraints underscore the importance of the participation of non-governmental partners in these proceedings. Government cannot do it alone. The private sector is the engine of economic growth. It creates jobs, increases trade, provides goods and services and generates revenue to fund basic public services such as health and education. The participation of a greater number of development partners will allow us to better target our priorities and to be more efficient in our strategic planning. Knowledge institutions and academia also play an important role in convening policy discussion and dialogues to generate recommendations and best practices for GMS governments. Thus, I still highly commend all GMS platforms including GMS Business Forum, GMS Development Partner Meeting, and PACER Dialogue (Policy Action for Covid-19 Economic Recovery).

Cambodia also acknowledges the importance of the GMS Regional Investment Framework (RIF) 2022 and particularly the GMS Transport Sector Strategy 2030. As well, the Royal Government is most happy with the Early Harvest Implementation of the GMS Cross-Border Transport Agreement (CBTA) which allows GMS nations to improve cross-border exchanges, promote trade and attract investment.

Looking into the future, the GMS Community needs a strong multilateralism and subregional economic integration that is fully equipped to deal with the realities and address the challenges of the 21st century. Cambodia recognizes the central role of multilateralism in addressing complex global challenges we face today, particularly this pandemic, and better emerge in the post-pandemic recovery.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.