

GMS Business Council (GMS-BC) Report
24th Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Ministerial Conference
Via Web-based Conferencing
4 November 2020

Statement by Mr. Oudet Souvannavong Chairman of GMS-BC, President of the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI).

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of GMS Business Council, I am very pleased to report the progress of GMS-BC's activities at this 24th GMS Ministerial Web-based Conference.

Since the last GMS Ministerial Conference on November 2019, GMS-BC continued to address the activities that were specified in the GMS Strategic Framework 2012-2022 and in the Hanoi Action Plan 2018-2022. In 2017, GMS-BC developed a Private Sector Strategic Action Plan 2018 – 2020, that outlined the direction for enhancing the economic integration in the GMS and the development and promotion of the private sector in: (1) cross border trade and transport facilitation; (2) promotion of investment in agriculture, processing industry, tourism and urban development in the GMS Economic Corridors; (3) promotion of SME/MSMEs; and (4) human resources development. Environmental protection, digitalization and promotion of e-commerce and enhancing the role of young and women entrepreneurship were also the cross-cutting areas for development.

One of the most dynamic activities of GMS-BC was centered through the activities of the GMS-Freight Transport Associations (GMS-FRETA). Currently, GMS-FRETA that is under the chairmanship of Thailand, is strengthening its organization by enhancing involvements from related transport and logistics enterprises and agencies in GMS countries. GMS-FRETA developed a strategic framework, which focuses on 3 areas; 1) reducing bottlenecks, 2) facilitating training, and 3) promoting logistic standardization. Achievement made during the period were:

- On 28th February 2020, GMS-FRETA and the Mekong Institute (MI) signed an MoU to cooperate in selected area of capacity building for regional development.
- Under the cooperation with the two institutions, MI is preparing to handover an interactive web-based GMS Logistic database for GMS-FRETA to run in 2021. The data base will enhance the GMS logistic network, promoting GMS logistic industry through e-platform, building network for logistic practitioners, and improving quality and timely service of domestic logistic providers. In addition, the cooperation with MI will enhance the role and capacity of GMS-FRETA for establishing a Green Logistic Auditor System or Green mark.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the major activities of GMS-BC were reduced to the minimum. GMS-BC appreciates ADB's rapid COVID-19 response to Southeast Asia. On 27th May 2020 and 22nd October 2020, GMS-BC held board meetings via web-conferencing to review the

progress of the activities and to discuss about the situation of the COVID-19 crisis and the different mitigation and support programs adopted by each GMS governments. The GMS-BC would like the GMS Governments to cooperate more on addressing the pandemic especially on the rehabilitation of industries that have been heavily affected by the crisis such as tourism and the processing industries and to initiate cross-border green lane for freight and people between GMS countries. The meeting further discussed the GMS Long-Term Strategic Directions to 2030 that was presented by the ADB in many meeting sessions with the private sector and fully support the directions and initiatives presented in the paper. The GMS Economic Cooperation Program Strategic Framework 2030 (GMS-2030). The Framework recognizes the importance of private sector in the long-term Economic Development, by embracing private sector solutions, by leveraging knowledge, technical resources, and capital of private sector, and by enhancing the role of the GMS-BC and GMS-FRETA. I wish that public and private partnership in development would be further enhanced to achieve the goals.

In order to accommodate the private sector to the new normal, GMS-BC intends to 1) use more digital platforms to work together among GMS-BC members 2) create new normal business networking such as B2B Platform that each members can invite local members to join and make the business matching over the platform and 3) organize online training and seminars to re-skill, up-skill and develop new-skill for local business sectors in each member countries.

In the next few years, GMS-BC wish to receive continued support from GMS Governments and development partners in terms of knowledge, funding and technical assistance. The highlight activities are to: (1) Organize web-based SME/MSMEs Network Forum to enhance business opportunities in GMS, and web-based seminar on digitalization for industries; (2) Develop and implement cross border trade platform; (3) Implement the GMS Logistics Database initiated by the Mekong Institute; (4) Arrange web-based seminar for the GMS Young Entrepreneur Network; (5) Address the issue on COVID-19 by participating in the development of travel bubbles between GMS countries; (6) Preparing a forum on minimizing the impact of the climate change to business in GMS. All of those activities would be presented at a GMS Business Conference 2021 that is planned to be organized back to back to the GMS Summit in Phnom Penh or via web-based conference depending on the COVID-19 pandemic situation. During the GMS Summit 2021, GMS-BC Chairmanship will be handled over from Lao PDR to Myanmar.

Finally, I would like to end this report by wishing your excellencies and good health and a successful meeting.

Thank you for your kind attention.