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Address by Gen. (Dr.) V.K. Singh (Retd), Minister of State for External Affairs at the INDIA-ASEAN Connectivity Summit in New Delhi (December 11, 2017)

December 11, 2017

Shri Nitin Gadkari, Hon'ble Minister for Road, Transport and Highways, Shipping and Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Government of India;

H.E. Mr. Phan Tam, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Information and Communications of Vietnam

H.E. Tauch Chankosal, Secretary of State, Ministry of Public Works and Transport, the Kingdom of Cambodia

Excellencies;

Ms. Shobana Kamineni, President, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII);

Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. On behalf of the Ministry of External Affairs and the Government of India, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this Summit.
2. Our Prime Minister, emphasizing that Connectivity with the ASEAN is a high priority for India, had announced the convening of the ASEAN-India Connectivity Summit at the 15th ASEAN-India Summit(AIS) in November 2017. Prime Minister had went on to observe that we share values reflective of a deep and sustained cultural connect and are driven towards a common destiny of joint development of our peoples in an environment of peace, stability and mutual trust.
3. This Summit reflects India's strong commitment to work together with all the stakeholders to enhance connectivity in India, with ASEAN and with other countries in the Indo-Pacific region. This Summit , also part of commemorative activities to celebrate the bonds of connectivity forged over 25 years of our dialogue relationship with ASEAN , shall further deepen our connectivity dialogue.
4. Our connectivity initiatives spanning across physical and digital projects are tailored to complement the strategic areas of Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity(MPAC) 2025 especially sustainable infrastructure, digital innovation, seamless logistics, regulatory excellence and people mobility. The session on ASEAN Connectivity Master Plan: Harnessing opportunities, would seek to carry forward the conversation on how India as a stakeholder and a dialogue partner can collaborate with ASEAN in harnessing the opportunities inherent in the MPAC 2025.
5. India shares multifaceted connectivity with ASEAN – land, air, maritime, cultural, civilizational and people-to-people connectivity which has formed the backbone of our strong relationship through the centuries.

6. Our historical maritime trade flourished through the Malacca Straits across the Indo Pacific region. Even today, maritime trade forms the backbone of our trade with the east and beyond. Let us unite to reconstruct the same trade connections today albeit with modern components of physical and digital connectivity.
7. On the Physical connectivity front, India has undertaken a number of international corridor projects such as the India Myanmar Thailand Trilateral Highway and Kaladan Multi-Modal Project which serves as the land as well sea bridge among the North Eastern States of India and the ASEAN member countries.
8. While the road component is progressing apace, Maritime connectivity , the mainstay of our historical trade relations,requires urgent modernization in the context of current geo political realities.
9. India has signed White Shipping Agreements with a number of countries, provided capacity building assistance and ensured capability enhancement by imparting training. In the similar vein, we are actively exploring signing ASEAN-India Maritime Transport Cooperation Agreement with ASEAN. This agreement will help both India and ASEAN to further cooperate and communicate with each other, eliminate barriers hindering maritime transport, and establish regional maritime transport framework system with the aim to promote maritime transport facilitation between ASEAN and India and beyond.
10. On the Air front we have already given access to airlines from ASEAN countries to our Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities. We would like to encourage them to use more Tier 2 cities for air connectivity .
11. India , undergoing a digital revolution, has facilitated adoption of digital technologies by MSMEs which we can share with ASEAN countries. We have held an ASEAN-India ICT Expo in December 2017 in Jakarta. We would be holding ASEAN-India Start-up Festival and Hackathon in Hyderabad and Jaipur in India and ASEAN India Grand Challenge in Singapore in January 2018 in which a number of Indian and ASEAN Start-ups in digital sector will have the opportunity to forge long term business relations.
12. We stand ready to share with ASEAN our positive experiences that we have enjoyed in digital sector which revolutionise ASEAN-India Digital Connectivity. We have shared with ASEAN, proposals on digital connectivity, outlining an integrated approach involving setting up of a regional high-capacity fiber optic network, a National Rural Broadband Network and Digital Villages in Remote Areas, which would digitally enmesh India and ASEAN, opening up new vistas for cooperation. Sessions on Digital Connectivity and Line of Credit at this Summit would explore convergence issues in detail.We have offered to ASEAN our indigenously developed GPON technology for establishing broadband connectivity in CLMV countries which shall bring internet to the masses, including in the rural sector. This technology is already digitally connecting 250,000 villages in India benefitting 600,000 people.
13. India is also setting up Centers of Excellence for Software Development and Training (CESDTs) in CLMV countries for capacity building in software technologies for which MOUs have already been signed.
14. This Connectivity Summit is also part of promoting people to people connectivity through holding of conferences, seminars, exchange programmes for students, media, parliamentarians and farmers which are being held regularly. We are also endeavoring to facilitate the bonding of our youth in a deeper level and to this end, we have hosted the Youth Summit in Bhopal in August 2017, an Artists Residency in Udaipur in September 2017 and Music Band Festival in New Delhi in October 2017. Such events have promoted closer contacts among our youth.
15. Our efforts are now towards sharing the gains of these reforms with ASEAN countries and seeking ways to harness the extant opportunities that emerge out of our collaboration in realising the strategic priorities of

MPAC 2025.

16. Also, as a new vista of cooperation in connectivity, there is a strong case for improving maritime connectivity among our islands. Both ASEAN and India are endowed with several islands. India has taken initiatives to build Andaman and Nicobar Islands as an economic and strategic hub in Bay of Bengal. ASEAN is also investing in infrastructure in its islands and there are scopes to unlock the vast potentials of cooperation, particularly in tourism, maritime security, disaster management, etc. To take the idea further, the session on Island Connectivity will address investment opportunities in ASEAN-India Islands Connectivity and discuss the challenges that need to be addressed in order to sustain the progress.
17. The sessions of this Summit are well paced and structured, addressing both contemporary as well as emerging issues on the discourse on Connectivity. I look forward to stimulating discussions spanning today and tomorrow. Let me conclude by wishing all the participants a productive discussion on all aspects of connectivity.

Thank You.



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