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Opening Remarks by the Minister of State for External Affairs, Gen (Dr.) V.K. Singh at 8th Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Ministerial Meeting in Manila, Philippines, 7 August 2017

August 07, 2017

Your Excellency, Mr. U Kyaw Tin, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar

Your Excellency, H.E. Saleumxay Kommasith, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR

Your Excellency, Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand

Your Excellency, Mr. Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam

Your Excellency, Mr. Prak Sokhonn, Senior Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Kingdom of Cambodia

1. I would like to thank the Mekong Ganga Cooperation Chair, Myanmar, for coordinating the conduct of this Ministerial Meeting. I would also like to thank the Hon'ble Ministers from the other participating countries – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam - for making it convenient to attend today's meeting.
2. Excellencies, let me also reiterate that the cooperation among our countries as part of the MGC framework, aims at restoring and re-invigorating these ancient linkages leading up to the building of an inclusive and prosperous society. It is in pursuance of this aim that we have proposed to add newer areas of cooperation to the traditional areas on tourism, culture, education, transport and communication. I am happy to note that we are progressing well in the identified areas of cooperation and in the implementation of the Plan of Action 2016-18. We look forward to sustaining this progress in the years to come and in further deepening our mutually beneficial partnership and cooperation.
3. Excellencies, on tourism, I am glad to say after successful organization of the International Buddhist Conclave in Varanasi in October, 2016, where all the MGC partners attended as special guests, we propose to make this an annual activity. We look forward to closely working with Myanmar for developing the 'Buddhist Trail' and designate Points of Contact for enhancing tourism cooperation among MGC countries.
4. It gives me great pleasure in announcing that the MGC Museum of Traditional Asian Textiles is fully functional and operational. Over the past year, the Museum has organized a variety of workshops, conferences and events. I would like to thank all partner countries for their continued support and look forward to hearing views on further improving the functioning of the Museum to include models on financial sustainability.
5. We look forward to supporting our Cambodian colleague on their proposal for Silk and Weaver's Association and of marketing of the museum by their Ministry of Culture and Tourism. On our part, India

would soon be inviting applications for training on Museology and Conservation techniques under the ITEC programme for the MGC partners.

6. Excellencies, in an effort to map our shared civilizational linkages, we have commissioned two projects. The first, called "Sailing to Swarna Bhumi," will chart and research our maritime encounters as reflected in the syncretic cultures of India and South East Asia. The second, called "Mapping of Inscriptions along the Mekong" will document inscriptions left by Indian nobles and traders along the Mekong river, which was the main artery of cultural interaction between India and mainland South East Asia for many centuries.
7. I am happy to share with you that Dr. Vijay P. Bhatkar, a leading scientist on supercomputing, has been appointed as the new Chancellor of Nalanda University in 2017. The university is well underway on its path towards becoming a leading academic institution focusing on Asian history and Mekong Ganga region. We also look forward to the support of all MGC countries towards creation of the Common Archival Resource Centre at Nalanda University.
8. I invite all the MGC countries to utilize the fifty new ITEC scholarships announced in the areas of culture, tourism, engineering, film directing, sound, lighting and stage management. As you know these are in addition to the nine hundred scholarships given every year to MGC countries. As we agreed last year, these scholarships can also be utilized for upgradation of teachers' education and training of faculty members for the Centres for English Language Training, Entrepreneurship Development Centers and the Vocational Training Centers established by India in the MGC member countries.
9. I propose that we task our Senior Officials to develop a Protocol to facilitate mutual recognition of academic qualifications in key fields, so that our students can reap the true benefits of the education that they gain in other MGC countries. This will motivate the youth of our countries to venture out, explore and develop new bonds of friendship, which is our ultimate aim.
10. I am pleased to announce that in fulfillment of our commitment made at the last Ministerial Meeting in July 2016, we conducted the 1st MGC Policy Dialogue on 'Stronger Connectivity Enhancing Ties' at New Delhi on 8 April 2017. We have just released the Outcome Document of the same. We look forward to this Policy Dialogue becoming an annual feature being hosted on rotation basis in each of the MGC countries.
11. On Connectivity, we have shared the concept notes on formation of Task Forces on Maritime Connectivity and Extension of Trilateral Highway into Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The eight-member Indian component to the Task Force on Maritime Connectivity has also been announced. We now await nominations from ASEAN member states.
12. We are examining the digital connectivity proposals that have been given by Lao PDR and Cambodia for implementation utilizing the US \$ 1 Billion Line of Credit extended by India. We would appreciate receiving more such proposals from other MGC Countries.
13. Excellencies, I am happy to announce that India will be conducting the ASEAN India Connectivity Summit in October 2017 at New Delhi. The Summit will examine all facets of connectivity and will incorporate G2G, B2G and B2B components. It will be our endeavour to identify and examine connectivity prospects between India and ASEAN, with a focus on the MGC region. I invite all countries to participate in the event with their official delegations and also to nominate their concerned Industry leaders and entrepreneurs for the same.
14. Excellencies, I am also glad to announce that India will be conducting the Global MSME Summit with a focus on ASEAN on 19-20 September 2017 at New Delhi. I invite all countries to participate in the event with their official delegations and also to nominate their MSMEs for the same.

15. Excellencies, it gives me great pleasure to share the enthusiasm of CLMV countries to the Quick Impact Projects. As on date, 26 projects are in different stages of implementation in Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam. We look forward to undertaking projects in Myanmar and I assure you of our continued cooperation in this regard.



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