

**Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program
Second Meeting of the GMS Economic Corridors Forum (ECF-2)
Governors Forum
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
19 September 2009**

Opening Remarks

**Mr. Arjun Thapan
Director General, Southeast Asia Department
Asian Development Bank**

(Excellency Sok Chenda),
Governors and Senior Provincial Executives,
GMS National Coordinators and other Senior Officials,
ADB colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning.

I join (Sok Chenda) in expressing our warm welcome to all of you to this very first Governors Forum being held in conjunction with the Second Meeting of the Economic Corridors Forum, and which I am honored to co-chair today.

I wish to express our gratitude to our host, the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia, for the warm hospitality and excellent meeting arrangements. As you have probably noticed in traveling to this meeting venue, Phnom Penh is rapidly transforming into a dynamic and progressive city befitting its future role as a key economic center of the Southern Economic Corridor (SEC). By immersing oneself in this city's activities and attractions, which I hope you could find the time to do after our meeting, you will get a good feel of the future potentials that full development of the SEC could bring to the peoples in the other parts of this corridor.

Following the call of GMS Leaders at the Third Summit in Vientiane in March 2008, the Economic Corridors Forum or the ECF was established in June 2008 in Kunming, PRC, to serve as the main advocate and promoter of GMS economic corridor development. As the newest GMS institution, the ECF aims to increase awareness of the needs and priorities in various GMS economic corridors, and to strengthen coordination, networking and facilitation of various initiatives to develop these corridors. The inaugural ECF meeting in Kunming adopted the Kunming consensus which, among others, endorsed the terms of reference of the ECF and called for adoption of strategies and actions plans for the priority GMS economic corridors, namely, the SEC, the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) and the North-South Economic Corridor (NSEC).

The ECF has a crucial role to play in ensuring a more focused and coordinated approach to economic corridor development. This was reiterated at the 15th GMS Ministerial Conference held in Petchburi, Thailand in June 2009. At that meeting, the GMS Ministers endorsed the strategies and action plans for the NSEC and EWEC. The GMS Ministers also directed all GMS institutions to work double time with the ECF in order to optimize returns from improved GMS physical connectivity.

This first-ever Governors Forum represents a major milestone in GMS economic corridor development and fulfills one of the ECF's main objectives, that is, to increase the involvement of local authorities in GMS economic corridor development. Henceforth, the Governor's Forum is expected to provide the framework and mechanism for stronger cooperation among provincial and local officials in addressing cross-border issues.

We have laid out a suggested format for today's meeting. We will commence with an overview of the GMS Program and economic corridor development, to give you an idea of where we are in our efforts to accelerate the transformation of transport corridors into true economic corridors and growth poles.

We follow this with the session on the strategies and action plans for the NSEC, EWEC and SEC, highlighting their key components, the issues and constraints in developing each corridor, and the priority actions and measures needed to address these issues and constraints. We hope to rally more support for, and greater local ownership of these strategies and action plans. We encourage local authorities who are present in this forum to actively participate in the open discussions and share your valuable insights on location-specific issues, challenges, and approaches. I am sure you will agree that there is no single formula for economic corridor development, and that having different strategies for the three GMS corridors is meant to take advantage of the strengths while recognizing the weaknesses in each corridor. Needless to say, the lessons on how best to manage and hurdle certain constraints, especially those that are common across the corridors, could be shared most effectively by local and national authorities under the umbrella of the ECF.

The third session will take up the implementation aspects of the corridor strategies and action plans. The focus will be on the roles of the public and private sectors and provincial authorities, and the areas and mechanisms for cross-border cooperation along the economic corridors. At the end of the discussions in this session, we hope that a stronger consensus would emerge as to the most feasible and effective forms of cooperation to deal with the implementation challenges of the strategies and action plans. We could perhaps define this early the basic elements of cooperation between central authorities across countries, between central and local authorities

within each country, between local authorities across countries, and between public and private sectors within and across countries.

Let me end by thanking all of you for being here today. We look forward to seeing clear demonstrations of your support for the GMS economic corridor development program, your strong ownership of the ECF, and your readiness to buckle down to work to ensure the success of our development endeavors in these corridors. On behalf of the ADB, let me wish all of us a productive meeting and a robust exchange of ideas as we journey on the road towards a great development future for the peoples of the GMS. Thank you.