Opening Speech to be delivered by

H.E. Vice-President Dr. Sai Mauk Khan

at the Opening Ceremony of the 4th GMS Environment Ministers' Meeting

Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar

29th January 2015

Your Excellencies,

Environment Ministers, Deputy Ministers from the GMS Countries,

Honorable Ambassadors from GMS countries,

Mr. James Nugent, Director General of Southeast Asia Department, Asian Development Bank,

Distinguished Delegates,

Honorable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A Very Good Morning to You All.

It is indeed my great pleasure to be here with all of you and deliver an opening speech at this 4th Environment Ministers' Meeting of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). I would like to warmly welcome all of you on behalf of Government of Myanmar and we are very pleased to host this great event in this Nay Pyi Taw. I am also honored your Excellencies, GMS ministers and high ranking officials from ADB for your kind presence here at this GMS Ministers' formal meeting holding with the meaningful theme of, "**Increasing Investments in Natural Capital in the Greater Mekong Sub-region**" to take forward the call for green growth made at the 3rd Environment Ministers' Meeting held in Cambodia in 2011, and to build on post Rio+20 momentum in the sub-region.

I am very pleased to know that, with special focus on the theme, the objective of this meeting is "**to garner high-level political endorsement that the GMS must scale up efforts to protect and enhance its Natural Capital to achieve socio-economic development goals"**. According to the whole agenda, I am confident that one of the key outcomes is a better understanding of key issues, challenges, and solutions among the senior government officials and major environment stakeholders focusing on scaling up investment in natural capital through a series of relevant meetings and dialogue of Senior Officials' Meeting, Biodiversity Landscapes Forum, Natural Capital Business Forum, Youth Environment Meeting and Natural Capital Dialogue conducted over the previous two days.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you all are aware, natural capital is the collection of ecosystem assets such as croplands, forests, mangroves, wetlands, inland, coastal water bodies, coral reefs, etc., and the capitals are essential to survival of our human beings. Having a healthy natural capital will accelerate not only GMS region, but also to global rapid economic growth as a whole for now and future. To have a healthy natural capital, we must exploit those natural capitals like forests, fisheries and soil and so on within their carrying capacity. For those natural capitals, however, for example fossil fuel, we must use them as efficient as possible before renewable capital be substituted in its place. And one important thing to all of us is that nature's services should not be considered as, "**Free Goods**". Effective protection and due investment should be promoted without fail.

For sustainability of natural capital, we must make more investments into them, which are fundamental to human wellbeing, than to production of raw from it. Investments on direct protection and enhancement of the quantity and quality of the stock of natural capital assets is thus crucially important for present and future generation. In addition, protection of natural capital through individual or collective form among GMS countries and the ability to coordinate efforts across key sectors within countries are truly important for the natural capital's sustainability. Equally important investment is such investment in economic sectors which base or depend on the flow of ecosystem services from natural capital assets.

To follow such resource management and investment systems, we need to invest in both at physical and social capitals substantially. Therefore, at the 5th GMS Summit held in December 2014 in Bangkok, the GMS leaders highlighted the GMS Regional Investment Framework (RIF) Implementation Plan (2014–2018) which encompasses;

1) physical capital by substantially expanding infrastructure to improve '**connectivity**,'

2) its human capital by supporting institutional and capacity development to improve '**competitiveness**,' and

3) its social capital by strengthening the sense of an economic '**community**.'

Regional Investment Framework is actually a strategic and results-based action plan to help address many of the challenges remained and to seize new opportunities for sustaining GMS cooperation and development.

In short, some enabling conditions to this effective investment in natural capital may include greater public awareness and political support, supportive policy interventions, more public and private finance, and stronger institutional and technical capacities. We need to bring all GMS stakeholders- governments, businesses, development partners, and civil society- together to jointly unlock investments in natural capital to ensure food, energy and water security in future in our region.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Pertaining to Myanmar's efforts for holding GMS meetings, we hosted the 4^{th} GMS Summit in December 2011 in Nay Pyi Taw where the GMS Countries' leaders unanimously adopted new Greater Mekong Sub-region Strategic Framework 2012- 2022 for the next ten years of our Mekong Sub-region's economic cooperation. It is noted that 10-year Regional Investment Framework (RIF) for the period of 2012 - 2022 has also been endorsed at the 19th GMS Ministerial Conference held in December 2013.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Through cooperation among GMS countries and ADB and Development Partners' supports, we have obtained considerable achievements in infrastructure connectivity, information and communication technology, transport and trade facilitation, economic corridors forum, agriculture, tourism, human resource development and environmental conservation. These results are realized both through our common vision and aspirations, strengthened commitments, mutual trust and close cooperation among GMS countries. In this regard, I appreciate and thank ADB and development partners for its continuous financial and technical assistances to our GMS programme.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

While there are remarkable achievements and outcomes under the GMS programme, a number of challenges remain to be addressed to us for better connectivity, increased competitiveness, and a greater sense of community in the GMS. We need to build up and strengthen our capacity to address some other climate and social issues in terms of climate change, disaster risk management, food, energy and water security, drug and human trafficking. These issues pose a big challenge to all of us, particularly to our efforts to social and economic development. Since no single nation can address all these challenges, we can successfully overcome with our GMS countries' earnest commitments through closer cooperation. In this context, all GMS countries are therefore urged to work more closely than ever before.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the new democratic government has assumed the state's power last 4 years ago, we, with earnest efforts, have been undertaking significant reform measures in the areas of political, economic, public administration and private sector development aiming to bring Myanmar into a modern, developed and democratic Nation. In the reform strategies, mainstreaming environment into development and promoting private investment in natural capital in different areas are among the national priorities with the aim to achieve inclusive growth and sustainable development in Myanmar. In today's meeting, I would like to encourage all GMS countries to promote investments in natural capital for their sustainability at the national level, and to adopt the concrete statement for enhancing partnership to invest in natural capital among GMS countries at the regional level.

Let me conclude by wishing every success of this 4^{th} Environment Ministers' Meeting, and I also wish your Excellencies and distinguished delegates a pleasant stay in Myanmar.

Thank you