

**Greater Mekong Subregion
Seventh Meeting of the Subregional Telecommunications Forum (STCF-7)
Guilin, PRC
30-31 March 2006**

Summary of Proceedings

Introduction

1. The Seventh Meeting of the Subregional Telecommunications Forum (STCF-7) held in Guilin, PRC on 30-31 March 2006, was co-organized by the Ministry of Information Industry (MII) of the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The STCF-7 meeting discussed the road map for GMS telecommunications development and future GMS cooperation arrangements in relation to: (i) implementation of GMS Telecoms Flagship program; (ii) construction of the GMS Information Superhighway Network (ISN); and (iii) pursuit of ICT for development and poverty reduction. The meeting also discussed GMS telecoms programs of various development partners in order to promote close coordination among such programs. Attached, as Appendix 1, is the Agenda and Program of the Meeting.

2. The participants included delegations from the Kingdom of Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the Union of Myanmar, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. Representatives from the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), UNESCAP and ADB also attended. The list of participants is attached as Appendix 2. The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Qian Tingshuo, Deputy Director General, Department of Overall Planning, Ministry of Information Industry (MII), PRC, and Mr. Anthony Jude, Principal Project Specialist, Infrastructure Division (MKID), Mekong Department, ADB. Mr. Wang Jianchao, Director, Department of Overall Planning, MII, PRC, moderated the Opening Session.

Opening Session

3. Mr. Qian warmly welcomed the participants to the meeting on behalf of the MII. He recalled that GMS cooperation in the telecom sector developed rapidly and is now one of the important areas of the GMS Program. He noted the progress of the backbone optical cable network, which laid the foundation for improved telecom service in the GMS. He added that the reform of telecom policies and opening up of the industry was accelerated through research and software initiatives. He stressed that improved communication infrastructure and services would play an important role in economic development and trade promotion in the subregion. He also informed on the progress achieved in the construction of the GMS Information Superhighway Network (ISN) through the signing of two MOUs on the ISN in November 2004 and July 2005, respectively. He cited the significance of the GMS ISN in strengthening economic and trade ties among GMS members, accelerating socio-economic development, improving competitiveness, and bridging the digital divide between developed and less developed areas. He discussed the importance of cooperation in capacity building particularly since telecom development relies on training, innovation, and research and management of advanced technologies. Capacity building should be cost-effective, efficient and adapted to the level of economic development. One area of focus, he stressed, is the development of rural telecommunications, for which cooperation could focus on research, sharing of experiences, and exploring suitable paths to development. He offered PRC's assistance to GMS members in the formulation of a plan for the

development of the industry. He concluded by thanking ADB for its leading role in GMS telecoms cooperation, and wished the Forum success.

4. Mrs. Wang Shanzhu, Deputy Director General, Guangxi Communication Administration, extended a warm welcome to participants and gave a quick brief on Guangxi Province, its people, geography and economy. She explained Guangxi's strategic geographic advantages, being at the juncture of the South/ Southwest China and ASEAN economic zones, an important link to Hong Kong, Macau and Western region of China, and a vital bridge to China-ASEAN cooperation. She noted that STCF-7 aims to exchange views on the role of communications in economic development, particularly of rural areas. She then gave an introduction on the development of Guangxi's communications development. She said that in 2005, the telecoms industry sustained its rapid growth of 22.9%, over 2004 levels as revenues grew by 11.5%, and the number of telephone users reached 18.9 million. She happily announced that by attaining 99.67% penetration, Guangxi has exceeded the MII target of 95% penetration under the "Telephone Service Available to Every Village" project. She announced development plans for the sector and added that the 11th Five Year Plan for Communications Development in Guangxi was approved by MII, assuring greater role of the telecoms industry in Guangxi's economic development. She invited everyone to enjoy the scenery of Guilin and wished the Forum much success.

5. Mr. Anthony Jude warmly welcomed participants to the STCF-7 meeting, and thanked the Government of PRC for the hospitality and excellent meeting arrangements. He noted the remarkable achievement in GMS telecommunications cooperation as shown at the GMS Telecoms Development Exhibition (TELDEX) at the 2nd GMS Summit in Kunming in July 2005. He recalled that the last STCF meeting took note of progress in developing the telecommunications backbone links and sector reforms, and called for future focus on two pressing issues; namely, developing the ISN and promoting ICT for poverty reduction. He reviewed the results of the ICT demand study of 2005, and noted that ICT could improve services delivery either through the use of ICT as a thematic thrust or through ICT development as a distinct sector. He said concrete steps should be identified to enhance ICT applications for development and poverty reduction. He then informed the meeting that ADB's Management called for ADB assistance to be focused in areas where ADB has relative advantage. Given increasing ownership of telecoms initiatives by GMS members, he noted that the main task now is to determine the way forward for telecoms cooperation. One area he cited is in further strengthening development partners' coordination in telecoms development, since rapid advances in ICT technologies require continuous upgrading efforts in technical, managerial and other capacities. Another important area he discussed is the regular review and updating of the GMS development matrix for the telecoms backbone and ICT flagship program, a useful regional planning tool. He concluded by stating that the challenge for GMS members is to transform GMS telecoms cooperation into a largely GMS-owned and strongly private sector supported program, leading to a modern, interconnected telecoms network responsive to a pro-poor development program.

I. The GMS Information Superhighway Network (ISN)

Report on Outcome of First ISN Steering Group/ Implementation Group Meeting

6. Mr. Wang introduced the work undertaken by both the Steering Group (SG) and Implementation Group (IG) of the GMS ISN. The SG, he clarified, is the committee for the coordination/ communication of ISN construction, and is established by the regulatory departments of GMS members at government levels. The first SG meeting was held in early

December 2005 in Guangxi, organized by the MII. Its major achievements included: (i) clarifying the working mechanism of the SG, covering purpose, composition, responsibilities and working procedure; (ii) formulating the Report on the Progress of the GMS Information Superhighway, covering network construction, government support and funding issues; and (iii) putting forward the solution to address the funding issues.

7. The IG, established in January 2005, comprised of telecoms operators from the six GMS countries in charge of telecommunications. The IG has met three times already and the major outcomes are as follows: (i) 1st IG Meeting (Kunming, January 2005)- undertook comprehensive discussion of drafting the network planning for ISN; agreed on the draft MOU of the Planning and Construction of the GMS ISN, including list of members of the IG; (ii) 2nd IG Meeting (May 2005)- clarified the content and modified the annexes of the MOU, discussed the proposed network construction and planning scheme for the ISN, and undertook preparations for signing the MOU at the 2nd GMS Summit; and (iii) 3rd IG Meeting (Nanning, January 2006)- discussed each country's progress in ISN construction, discussed report of future GMS ISN management and agreed on establishing the Network Operation Team, and updated country planning. With Thailand (CAT Telecom) as Chair, the 3rd IG meeting carried out consultations on cable connection and circuit activation between Myanmar and other countries, internet connections, responsibilities of Interim Planning Subcommittee (IPSC), system connection between China and Lao PDR, etc.

8. Mr. Wang clarified that the SG is composed of senior officials of telecoms departments of GMS countries, while the IG is composed of representatives of telecom enterprises. Mr. Jude asked how were the early meetings funded and Mr. Wang said that PRC supported the logistics of only the SG meeting. On the issue of getting the ISN moving in terms of a clear work program and time frame, Mr. Wang replied this would be addressed by Thailand in the next presentation as current chair of the SG. Mr. Jude informed of the re-thinking of ADB's role in the sector, clarifying that ADB would now assume the role of facilitator and initiator of policy and sector reforms, with the private sector taking on ISN implementation and infrastructure development role. H.E. Chin Bun Sean (Cambodia) asked about the earlier funding allocation for telecom development in Cambodia and Lao PDR; Mr. Jude said that since private sector financing is available in the telecom sector, the funding originally intended for ICT development was re-allocated to other priority areas of ADB assistance. However he asked the GMS members to clearly convey to ADB officials through their respective focal ministries during country programming missions, whether they still considered ICT development a priority area for ADB assistance.

Progress of the ISN

9. Mr. Tanin Youkhaw, Assistant Vice President, CAT Telecom Public Co., Ltd., Thailand, on behalf of the GMS Implementation Group (IG) Committee provided the background of the GMS ISN, starting with the timeline of the GMS ISN (e.g., MOU signing, network planning study, IG meetings, GMS ISN MOU signing, TPRI¹ Reports, SG meeting, etc.). He showed the plan for constructing the ISN for Phase I Ready For Service (RFS) by end of 2008 and Phase II RFS by end of 2010 and illustrated the GMS ISN cooperation mechanism. He then gave country updates on development of the GMS ISN, showed the preliminary points-of-presence (PoPs) for each country, and described the existing connections between each GMS country. He gave the

¹ Telecommunications Planning Research Institute (TPRI) of China Academy Telecom Research, MII

detailed plan for development of the GMS ISN, starting with the optical fiber cabling and transmission systems, and the estimated investment cost of these (total for all GMS: \$65.9 million). He described the internet links under the ISN for Phases I and II. He noted the investment share of each country for the ISN, with Myanmar taking up approximately 56.4% of total investment requirement. He showed the results of the financial analysis of the project, based on the project study from TPRI, with ROI of around 36% and payback period of 9 years. He discussed the difficulties faced by the GMS IG in the finalization of PoPs, funding, and resolving other high-level issues.

10. Ms. Nguyen Hien, Viet Nam, suggested proper structuring and timing of SG and IG meetings so that IG discussions and decisions are taken up at the SG meeting. Mr. Jude noted that while there are several IG meetings, one such meeting could be held back-to-back with an SG meeting. He clarified that certain private sector projects (such as fiber optic cabling) could be explored for ADB financing through its private sector window.

Work Plan of ISN SG

11. Mr. Wang requested physical support from ADB in the holding of SG meetings. He also suggested that ADB provide technical assistance in the research for operation of the ISN. Mr. Jude said the request would be raised with ADB management, although he informed the participants of ADB's move to streamline TAs particularly with respect to the proportion of project preparation TAs relative to advisory TAs.

II. Road Map for GMS Telecommunications Development

Cambodia

12. H.E. Chin Bun Sean, Secretary of State, Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPTC) described the status of the telecom sector in Cambodia, noting that telecom service penetration was only 7% nationwide; in urban areas, however, penetration was 30% while in rural areas this was less than 1%. He stressed the urgent need for reform to bridge the wide digital divide. He said the national communication policy aims to ensure delivery of efficient, cost-effective and affordable services, consistent with pursuit of national development. He discussed Government's plans for introducing reforms for progress of the sector. He informed of recent actions and progress achieved in the sector such as completion of the national policy statement, establishment of Telecom Cambodia (TC), and completion of the Telecom Act draft (to be signed by Council of Ministers shortly). He discussed the major international cooperation initiatives such as the \$30 million JBIC loan for constructing the OFC link between Kampong Cham- Phnom Penh- Takeo- Kampot- Sihanoukville, ADB's proposed TA on implementing the telecommunication sector reforms, and the World Bank pilot project on rural telecoms in three (3) provinces. He also added that the newly established Telecom Cambodia was looking for partners in investments, capacity building, and financial management.

PRC

13. Mr. Wang Jianchao, Director, Department of Overall Planning, MII, PRC, presented a summary of developments in China's telecoms sector in 2005, which included: annual growth in industry turnover (24.6%), revenue (11.3%), value-added (12%), and investment in fixed assets. He noted the increase in number and density of fixed and mobile subscribers, and the number

of internet users (dial-up, leased and broadband) in 2005. He also gave the 2005 figures for length of optical cable lines, switch capacity of long distance telephone, mobile switch capacity, internet broadband access ports and number of websites and domain names. He discussed the main features for the development in the industry in 2005, namely: turnover of telecom services; slowed growth of telephone subscribers; steady investment scale; gradual market increase in the central area; and gains in the project "Telephone Service Available to Every Village". He noted the difficulty of sustaining rural communications development, with need for long-run market responsiveness. He observed that while still behind internationally, PRC's telecoms industry would steadily develop given continuous regulatory and market reforms.

Lao PDR

14. Mr. Somlith Phouthonesy, Deputy Director General, Department of Post and Telecommunications, Ministry of Communications, Transport, Post and Construction (MCTPC), Lao PDR reported on ongoing reform of the regulation and supervision of the telecom sector that was made possible by assistance from ADB, WB, Japan and other partners. Reforms that MCTPC committed to implement included: adoption of formal telecom policy statement; adopting a comprehensive Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA); establishment of Communications and Multimedia Regulatory Authority (CMRA) as regulatory authority under MCTPC; and adoption of regulations pursuant to the CMA. He discussed the telecoms sector policy statement being considered by Government and its major initiatives. He also gave the provisions of the CMA, which will establish a comprehensive legislative framework. On the CMRA, he explained that this authority would be responsible for supervision of the telecoms and ICT sectors. He added that the ICT policy drafted in 2004 by the Science, Technology, and Environment Agency (STEA), was returned to the ministries for review; STEA is currently drafting the ICT Master Plan with UNDP assistance.

Myanmar

15. Mr. Aye Kyaw, Deputy Director General, Myanmar Post and Telecommunications (MPT), provided the general profile of the telecom sector in Myanmar, described the country's telecom infrastructure, and showed the organization of the MPT. He discussed the tariff regulatory process and MPT's role in this. He showed the telecoms exchange status of Myanmar, its microwave links, overseas communications channels, and the level of 2004 traffic from Myanmar to other GMS countries. He described the country's domestic satellite communications system, mobile telephone system, and internet system configuration. He discussed the efforts at improving connectivity including the establishment of fiber optic cable (OFC) links with other countries as shown in the OFC map. On data communications, he showed data on internet users and access modes. He discussed the assistance requirements in the ICT sector and the role of ICT in Myanmar's development, afterward showing the plan for Myanmar's Silicon Village project

Thailand

16. Ms. Chirapa Chitraswang, Advisor for Communications, Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (MICT), provided economic projections for Thailand as background for required public sector investments in the telecoms sector for 2005-06. She briefed on the policy and regulatory framework and policy and regulatory developments, particularly on licensing framework of the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC).

She gave the suggested policy changes involving speeding up telephone numbers project and broadband internet services. She discussed the initiatives for bridging the digital divide, e.g., ICT Cities and One District-One Dream School, Ministry of Education Network (MOENet) project. She discussed other initiatives to improve accessibility, promote HRD and e-learning, business facilitation and liberalization, and new services (e.g., e-passport, disaster relief). She summarized figures on telecom subscribers (fixed and mobile, SMS, internet and broadband) and operators' markets shares and gave the status of the OFC network, IP Star Satellite Service (for USO and broadband), and service access achievements and targets. She noted the challenges involving MICT initiatives in promoting ICT use by SMEs, developing animation and multimedia, and promoting investment so as to modernize the ICT sector. Lastly she briefed on the Telecom Backbone Phase I project and capacity building activities.

Viet Nam

17. Ms. Nguyen Thi Phuong Hien, Senior Officer, Ministry of Posts and Telematics (MPT), provided a status of telecom operators and subscribers in Viet Nam as of the end of 2005. She discussed the Action Plan up to 2010 involving targets for telephone density, internet subscription rate, internet usage, coverage of telecom infrastructure (in terms of speed, quality, and cost), development of new enterprises, and creating favorable conditions for enterprise provision of services. She discussed the proposed solutions to achieve the sector targets such as more effective state management, capital mobilization, accelerating fair competition, and enhancing domestic and international cooperation, among others.

18. **Discussions.** Ms. Chirapa, replying to a query from Cambodia, clarified that internet service provision in schools was financed by the Ministry of Education. Mr. Tanin, replying to a query from PRC, clarified that there are 63,000 villages in Thailand covered by USO; he then gave details on the subscriber base per type of service. Mr. Jude requested Lao PDR for clarification on the time frame for approval of the ICT policy and the telecoms policy statement. U Aye Kyaw explained the reasons behind the slow internet and mobile service in Myanmar, which is being addressed with capacity expansion. H.E. Chin Bun Sean raised the problem of illegal telecoms services in the border areas of Thailand and Cambodia. Ms. Chirapa replied that such problem is being reviewed and could be addressed by stronger regulations; Mr. Jude noted this problem could also be dealt with by offering competing services. Mr. Fedorov (UNESCAP) conceded the difficulty in tackling this problem, which involves keeping pace with rapid advances in technology.

ADB Briefing: Status of GMS Telecommunication Flagship Projects

19. Mr. Jude informed that discussions on the status of flagship projects would be moved to session V, when the recent updates/ improvements in the development matrix are presented and discussed.

III. ICT for Development and Poverty Reduction

Presentation: Findings/ Recommendations of Regional Study

20. Mr. Anthony Jude presented an overview of GMS activities in the use of ICT for development (ICT4D) and poverty reduction, and ADB's role in the propagation of ICT. Based on the request of the STCF-6 for a regional study to harness ICT for poverty reduction in the

GMS, ADB engaged a short term consultant to do the study covering three countries: Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam, and performed tasks such as assessment of e-community, e-commerce and e-government basic service demand, development of possible investment project to fulfill ICT demand and identification of possible investment modalities and financing options. He briefed on the major findings of the ICT study, one of which was that ICT can improve delivery of services in rural and remote areas providing major ICT4D platforms of eGovernance, eCommerce, eLearning, eExtension and eCommunity. Another finding was the variance in GMS countries' readiness toward wider ICT access, infrastructure and policy-wise. He also briefed on various modes available to promote ICT in remote rural areas- the adoption model, government model, commercial model and school model, each of which has an associated investment modality that could be tested in the GMS. The ICT study proposed eight (8) investment projects to fulfill ICT demand, most of which are regional or advisory technical assistance projects.

21. Mr. Jude then cited three (3) major reasons for promoting ICT in rural and remote areas: one, the MDGs encourage the use of information and knowledge to combat poverty; two, the World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS) provides for the establishment of rural access points; and three, the ITU missing link hypothesis states that telecoms infrastructure will prosper only if partnered with thematic sectors such as rural health, food security, natural resources management, etc. ADB thus pursues ICT4D through both the thematic and sectoral approaches. In the first, ICT is a theme within other sectors such as agriculture, health, education and public/ private sectors work, an approach adopted in most TA and loan projects. In the sectoral approach, ICT is itself a sector that needs strengthening (infrastructure development, policy, capacity building). Mr. Jude then briefly described the projects where ICT4D was used as a thematic thrust in education, agriculture and public sector projects in Cambodia. He also discussed the GMS initiatives wherein ICT was approached as a sector, such as feasibility studies for the fiber optic backbone, RETA 6004 on telecoms policy reform, and sector studies for 2004 (basic social service delivery with ICT) and 2005 (ICT demand study). He described the multi-sectoral partnerships in ICT4D in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam involving international/ regional agencies, government sectors, civil society and the private sector. On the missing link hypothesis, he noted that thematic sectors are the purview of specialized agencies such as FAO, WHO, ILO, and ESCAP, where ICT is an important theme. He stressed that the presence of IT facilities is among the main concerns of prospective investors, as raised at the East West Economic Corridor meeting in Ho Chi Minh City last week.

22. **Discussions.** Replying to a query from Cambodia, Mr. Jude cited examples where loan projects (particularly in the health sector) consisted of ICT components to make them more responsive. Mr. Jude said he would convey to sector staff in ADB, about the need to incorporate ICT in loan projects, so that ICT components no longer compete for limited loan proceeds.

Highlight on Rural ICT Experiences: Cambodia, PRC, and Lao PDR

23. **Cambodia.** Mr. Lay Mariveau, Deputy Director General, MPTC, presented on Cambodia's ICT development plan, starting with a description of the telecoms market, and the regulatory functions of the MPTC. He described the current status of the ICT network, showed the features of internet services, and explained the roles of MPTC and TC in ICT infrastructure development. He noted the breakdown of mobile and fixed line subscribers, the former outnumbering the latter 20 to 1. He showed the rapid growth in internet subscriptions centered around the major cities (Phnom Penh, Siem Reap) and gave the market shares of firms for both

fixed and mobile lines. He discussed the international gateway facilities and growth of internet service providers from 1997 to 2005. He then elaborated on the ICT Strategy and Activity Plan as contained in the 5-Year National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2006-2010. He discussed the goals, particularly goal # 2 involving construction of national infrastructure (covering OFC and ISN construction) and goal # 3 involving delivery of ICT services to society. He explained the current status of the ISN and the efforts to secure financing for main segments of the ISN. He showed the PoP or IP gateway with redundancy system connection. He added that major challenges include expanding the national backbone to all provinces and expanding telephone capacity in rural areas.

24. **PRC.** Ms. Liu Zhanxia, China Academy of Telecommunication Research, MII, PRC, provided the current status of rural ICT in PRC, showing trends in number of telephone subscribers, percentage of village interconnections, and internet access of farmers. She discussed the future of ICT in rural areas in PRC and the working mechanisms for developing ICT in rural areas, consisting of: exploring universal service mechanism, support for financing and policy, adopting flexible fee policy and implementing technology strategy. She gave the advantages of the SCDMA system and its applications in PRC. On the technology scheme for ICT development, she gave the principles of feasible and economic access technologies. She then discussed the effects of ICT in the rural areas' economy and society: for the countryside, this helped enhance culture, education, sanitation and business; for the farmer this helped increase incomes; for agriculture this helped in modernization and increase in efficiency. She suggested greater cooperation in promoting ICT for GMS rural areas since GMS countries have similar geography, landforms and economies.

25. **Lao PDR.** Mr. Syyang Chertoi, MCTPC, Lao PDR, introduced the characteristics of Lao PDR (population, land area, teledensity, and internet access/ penetration). He discussed the current telecoms development in Lao PDR and noted the major telecoms players. He showed the national fiber optic cable (OFC) routes (existing and planned) in the country and how these connect to different GMS neighbors and their time frames for interconnection. He showed the proposed system configuration of the GMS ISN in Lao PDR, which should switch traffic north-south and east- west; this configuration however, has not yet been agreed with the other GMS members.

26. **Discussions.** Mr. Fukawa (JBIC) inquired about the financial arrangements in PRC's rural ICT program; Mr. Wang replied that MII spearheaded the Village Access project but assigned implementation to the six major telecoms enterprises. Mr. Fedorov said it was important to look into the sustainability of the project, particularly in maintaining e-community centers. Mr. Wang said the government would be responsible for the e-community centers, but Mr. Fedorov noted that it would be important to provide content information to e-community centers. Mr. Wang clarified that MII would be involved only in providing the infrastructure, and that other ministries would help set up the knowledge base for content application. On Thailand's query regarding the SCDMA system, PRC clarified that the range of the system is from 38 to 50 kilometers if the terrain is flat, and less if the terrain is mountainous, and the power and investment requirements for such systems are low (solar power could be tapped). PRC added that the system could also handle data transfers, though the current system does also. Data handling systems will be introduced later in the year. Mr. Fedorov asked whether the SCDMA technology is available to other countries and at what cost. PRC mentioned that cost of a base station terminal is around \$70,000 and the SCDMA telephone is about \$65. A number of BST will have to be located or interconnected with existing or nearby optic fiber cables. Mr.

Wang also requested that a mechanism could be set-up with ADB's help to explore suitable communication technologies for rural penetration in GMS countries. He said SCDMA technologies could be delivered to interested countries, and demonstration projects could be established where demanded. H.E. Sean noted however that the cost might constrain wider usage in rural areas of the GMS. Mr. Jude said the SCDMA system could still be pilot tested for usage and affordability to less isolated but presently unconnected rural areas.

IV. Development Partner Coordination in GMS Telecommunications Development

Presentation on Key Sector Initiatives

27. **GMS Capacity Building in Telecom Sector (PRC).** Mr. Li Yalin, Official, Department of Overall Planning, MII discussed the importance of capacity building in the telecom sector, and noted that this is much needed since there are always new technologies and services that arise. The aim was to have a cost-effective model of capacity building suited to levels of development of GMS members. He said GMS officials have agreed to leverage capacity building in the sector and cited ADB's leading support for such activities. He presented the GMS Telecom Training Program, co-sponsored by ADB and MII, which trained many senior telecom officials/technicians. This program had two terms: the first covered reform and development of PRC's telecom sectors, and network development in the world, among others; the second covered mobile communications network, and introduction to China Mobile Communications Group Corp., including technology and service level, network capacity and operation and others. He added that this training program was considered a success in terms of curriculum setting and in-depth expert teaching, and in serving as platform for ideas exchanges.

28. **Suggestions on GMS capacity building.** Mr. Li proposed that ADB play a leading role in GMS capacity building due to the following reasons: (i) it has solid financial foundation to assist developing GMS countries; (ii) it has strong coordinating capability needed in the successful implementation of training programs; and (iii) it has strong international influence and good cooperative relations telecoms capacity building with institutions. He said PRC could share its experiences with other GMS members that could help develop suitable and cost-effective capacity building models. He added that PRC made a number of mistakes in the development of telecoms sector and GMS countries can learn from such mistakes and not repeat them in their respective countries. He enjoined other GMS members to provide suggestions for, and actively participate in capacity building activities in telecoms. He proposed the setting up of in-country training centers with financial/ technical support from ADB, in 2-3 countries with less developed capacity in telecoms. Such training centers could map out training programs and identify/ field experts for multiple level trainings in various countries. Operationally, ADB could organize experts to the centers in batches, to provide management, policy and technical trainings. Advantages included reduced travel/ accommodation costs, expanded coverage of program beneficiaries, and improved efficiency.

29. **JBIC in the Telecommunications Sector.** Mr. Kensuke Fukawa, Representative, JBIC Representative Office in Bangkok, commenced with JBIC's overall policy toward the sector. He said the priority is in developing infrastructure for sustainable growth, considering that insufficient infrastructure acts as bottleneck to growth. He stressed the importance of infrastructure in achieving the MDGs and in reducing poverty. He discussed the various issues in promoting infrastructure for sustainable growth, such as: establishing policies and systems; putting in place an operation and maintenance system; and expanding market access through

public-private partnerships. He then discussed the future direction of assistance for supporting high priority infrastructure development, undertaking political and system improvements, and implementing wide-area infrastructure across boundaries. Mr. Fukawa profiled the JBIC-financed project in Cambodia, the Greater Mekong Telecommunication Backbone Network Project costing 3.039 billion yen to construct an optical cable backbone in Sihanoukville- Phnom Penh- Kompong Cham area. He enumerated the expected sector activities in Cambodia such as establishment of Universal Services Obligations (USO) and establishment of the Telecom Authority. Finally, he listed the steps to be taken toward improving sector management in Cambodia, comprising among others, approval of the sub-decree of Telecom Cambodia and the draft Telecommunication Law, and establishment of Telecom Cambodia as a public enterprise.

ICT Policy and Applications for Development

30. Mr. Guennady Fedorov, Chief of ICT Policy Section, Information, Communication and Space Technology Division (ICSTD), UNESCAP, first gave a brief on UNESCAP and its three thematic areas of reducing poverty, managing globalization and emerging social issues. He noted the regional institutions with which UNESCAP coordinates work in these areas, including established regional organizations such as ADB and the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT). He situated ICSTD within the UNESCAP's organizational structure for managing globalization and provided the focus, cooperation links, objective and priority of the ICSTD. He listed the ICSTD's expected accomplishments, particularly in enhancing capacities to implement regulatory/ institutional frameworks for equitable access to information/ communication, and designing and implementing ICST-integrated development initiatives. He explained how ICSTD works towards bridging the digital divide in Asia and the Pacific, and how its Policy Section undertakes regional coordination of implementation of WSIS outcomes and creation of enabling ICT policy environment. He then discussed the functions of the Application Section and Space Technology Applications Section. He noted that ICT activities in the GMS previously included the IP Programme for Private Sector Development (Japan-funded) and E-commerce capacity building. Current ICT activities include the development of e-business development services for SMEs in the GMS (UNDP-funded) which involves identifying e-business development services needs and improving/ equipping e-business development services enterprises, among others.

31. **Discussions.** Mr. Jude suggested to the participants to consider using the ADB Phnom Penh Plan (PPP) to address some of the capacity building needs of GMS countries. For this ADB would require a structured, well-defined training program. Centers in PRC could be considered for such training or even in TOT (Thailand). ADB was not against establishing telecoms training centers in one or two GMS countries but there would need to be greater ownership by the country/ utility to ensure sustainability of such centers. He called for PRC to submit a training plan after consulting the GMS countries and ADB would explore how such training could be supported within the existing PPP structure. In response to a query from Cambodia, ADB and JBIC discussed the status and prospects of providing additional technical assistance grant to support telecom sector reforms in Cambodia. Mr. Fukawa agreed to discuss the matter with JBIC HQ, which was willing to discuss with ADB on the gaps in assistance as a result of the downsizing of the TA amount from \$1 million to \$700,000. Responding to the query from Viet Nam, Mr. Fedorov clarified preparations for the implementation of WSIS-mandated initiatives. He added that ICT has now moved from the telecoms sector to other sectors (science and technology, education, etc.) and therefore UNESCAP ICT activities are at times participated in by representatives of ministries other than the ICT/ Telecoms officials of GMS countries.

Planning as First Step of Communication Development

32. Mr. Lu Chuncong, Vice President, TPRI, China Academy Telecommunication Research, MII, provided the history of development of PRC's communications industry and showed the features of the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th Five-Year Plans and their contributions to planning. He proceeded to the general introduction of communication planning and discussed the classification of communications plan, according to function, layers of management and time plan covered. He explained the differences between comprehensive network plan and private plan for a special network and showed a diagram of each type. He showed the planning tool using software for transmission network planning. He then discussed the new mission of current communication planning considering a competitive environment, and effecting transition from an incumbent carrier. He said a successful transition requires proper objective, correct strategy and implementation steps. Mr. Wang hoped ADB could provide support for general telecom planning for the GMS region.

33. **Wrap Up of Day 1.** Mr. Jude provided the summary of the STCF-7 discussions for day 1. He said the ISN discussions in Session 1 focused on the timeline of IG and SG activities. He noted that the report by TPRI would be finalized shortly and requested PRC and Thailand to share the report with development partners after consulting with other GMS countries. He also noted that Phase I and Phase II of the ISN have missing links for which financing would be actively sought. He noted PRC's request for ADB support for SG meetings; he stressed however that in order for ADB to play a more active role in the SG, the latter should have clear future work plans that he could present to ADB management. In Session 2 he recalled that all six countries presented their respective sector reforms and policies, investment requirements for ISN and ICT development, and development trends in their respective telecoms/ ICT sectors. He noted Thailand's telecoms training center in the light of PRC's proposal for establishing a GMS telecoms training center and asked views of other GMS countries if such centers are needed in their respective countries or the center in Thailand could be used as a regional training hub. In Session 3 he noted the views of what has been done in ICT in the three countries- Cambodia, PRC and Lao PDR. He provided what ADB has done in the ICT field and what it intends to do for future projects based on ICT as a theme and as a sector. In Session 4 he recalled the presentation by PRC on its training programs and proposal for a GMS training center, for which ADB support was requested. He raised the issue of sustainability of such a center, and the need for continuing country ownership to drive the institution. He stressed ADB's role as a catalyst, but added that GMS countries would have to exert strong ownership to sustain operations of the training center.

34. Mr. Jude then recalled JBIC's presentation on its role in meeting funding gaps in infrastructure, which is substantial considering the demand not just from the telecoms sector but also from the transport and energy sectors. He recalled UNESCAP's presentation on ICT policy and applications for sustainable socio-economic development, and the various e-commerce and e-business applications for development that are possible. He noted the PRC presentation on coordination and planning requirements for putting a system network in place. He said that a key issue in all these is defining the role of ADB and how to move forward in GMS telecoms cooperation.

35. Mr. Jude said that he would bring to ADB management the need to (i) support the holding of SG meetings in order to move the implementation of ISN programs forward; (ii) seek funds for sustainable rural ICT applications; (iii) seek financing to bring the TA to Cambodia for

implementing telecoms sector reforms back to \$1 million; and (iv) support capacity building of GMS telecoms ministries and enterprises. An ADB response on the above issues will be sent within three (3) weeks. He added that in supporting subregional activities in the telecoms sector, ADB would have to coordinate its assistance with the APT, ITU, the World Bank and JBIC to maximize the benefits within the existing planned training programs of these institutions. On ADB support for GMS telecoms training, a review of how the earlier program jointly implemented with PRC would be needed; in addition there is a need to conduct consultations with other GMS members on the priority fields of training, patterned after the Phnom Penh Plan (PPP) model for training in development management.

DAY 2

V. Future Actions for GMS Cooperation

Recent Improvements on the GMS Development Matrix/ Updates

36. Mr. Jude presented the features of the revised development matrix, and he emphasized that the matrix is being used to monitor the status of current projects and to market the priority projects for financing by development partners. He said the matrix was a result of preparations for the First GMS Summit; the current plan is for the matrix to be used as a marketing tool for various forums or meetings being organized by ADB to mobilize development partner and private sector support for financing priority GMS projects, such as at the Mekong Development Forums (MDFs). He showed the recent changes made on the matrix that were meant to simplify it, facilitate its updating and enhance users access without losing key information. He showed the various fields and columns of the matrix and briefly demonstrated its use, sorting the projects by flagship or sector or country, and showing how the project titles in the matrix are linked to project profiles, whenever the latter are available. Thus the matrix includes ongoing and proposed projects and excludes to the extent possible the completed ones. He said the matrix is comprehensive since it covers all GMS projects, including not only ADB's but also those of other cooperation programs (BIMSTEC, ACMECS, etc.). In this regard ADB requested the GMS participants to provide ADB with project profiles for ongoing and proposed telecoms projects for inclusion in the matrix. He added that while the matrix updating process is continuing, the current cycle of updating the matrix will be completed in one month and this will be available at the GMS website for downloading.

37. Responding to Lao PDR's query on possible investments by the private sector of projects in the matrix, Mr. Jude explained that ADB will assist potential private sectors in project financing. As a result of ADB's marketing efforts of power projects in Cambodia, two hydropower projects are being considered by the private sector through public-private partnership. He noted that ADB's private sector group is currently in Cambodia for discussions with Government on private sector funding for these power projects.

Discussion on Priority Areas of Cooperation: ISN; Capacity Building; ICT

38. Mr. Wang said that PRC will actively assist ADB in supporting the deepening of GMS cooperation in the telecoms sector and presented four (4) areas where ADB's support would be critical. The first is in enhancing support for the GMS Information Superhighway, particularly in research for network operation and maintenance. Second is in promoting rural communications

development in the GMS. He elaborated on the third area: support for capacity building and technical innovation through the set-up of training center(s) in 1-2 countries. This center could be designed to meet the different training requirements of each country, and PRC could dispatch experts based on telecom technology training required. One center could cost \$100,000 to set up, and each term of training could cost \$50,000. The last area could be in carrying out research on planning for GMS telecom development. PRC proposed that ADB convene a telecom planning committee to conduct research and formulate a telecom development plan for the GMS.

39. **Discussions.** Ms. Chirapa discussed how a Thai telecoms training team is deployed to undertake training programs in different GMS countries. She noted that this method is flexible and cost effective since it does not require maintaining a building for the training center. Mr. Wang stressed that PRC only intended the program to be cost effective and to involve more people. The aim is also to maximize the use of existing training centers within each country for meeting the country's training needs. H.E. Chin Bun Sean noted that GMS countries should tap training program support by other organizations such as WB, APT and ITU. Mr. Syyang agreed to the establishment of a training center, which could find funding from many sources. U Maung Maung Tin said Myanmar could provide the site for the training center. Mr. Wang noted that GMS countries have differing training needs, such that training courses are usually designed for a particular country. He said the aim is to train as many local staff as possible. Ms. Ha noted that a training center would incur operation and maintenance costs. Mr. Jude said the telecoms training program would need to explore support from other partners; he said each GMS country should identify one's priority training needs, and experts could be tapped from different GMS countries. He would consult with ADB management on priority training courses to be supported, but stressed the need for a structured training program before ADB commits to support the program. One priority area could be in piloting ICT applications, and GMS countries could identify their needs in this area. Mr. Fedorov informed that UNESCAP has set up an ICT training center in Korea, which would be operational in June 2006. He noted that this center could be utilized to meet some of the GMS countries' telecoms training needs in ICT. He also indicated that depending on the training needed ESCAP could finance the cost of experts to provide these trainings.

40. Mr. Fukawa agreed that the priority training needs would have to be identified first and noted that different countries have varying needs due to differences in equipment types. Mr. Fedorov said a major cost item would be the travel expense of bringing experts to GMS countries. Mr. Jude said it would be more cost-effective to utilize existing training centers, but the priority at this time is to structure the training program needed by the GMS countries. Mr. Jude asked PRC to take the lead in coordinating the identification of each GMS country's priority training needs, to ensure GMS ownership of the training program. He asked GMS representatives to submit this to PRC within four weeks.

Confirmation of Priority Areas/ Way Forward

41. Ms. Chirapa suggested that ADB consider providing assistance in ISN network operation and maintenance, which is a high priority. Mr. Jude noted that the four areas of telecoms cooperation identified by PRC has been accepted by the body and requested PRC to further develop the proposals for circulation within two weeks and for further comments by other GMS countries, ADB and UNESCAP.

**Greater Mekong Subregion
Seventh Meeting of the Subregional Telecommunications Forum (STCF-7)
30-31 March
Guilin, PRC**

Tentative Agenda and Program

Meeting Objectives:

1. To discuss the road map for GMS telecommunications development and future GMS cooperation arrangements in relation to:
 - a. Implementation of the GMS Telecommunications Flagship program; and
 - b. Construction of the GMS Information Superhighway Network (ISN); and
 - c. Pursuit of ICT for development and poverty reduction.
2. To promote closer donor coordination in the implementation of GMS telecommunications programs.

Day 1

0830 - 0900 **Registration**

0900 - 0920 **Opening Session**

Welcome and Opening Remarks by

1. Mr. Qian Tingshuo, Deputy Director General, Department of Overall Planning, Ministry of Information Industry (MII), PRC
2. Mr. Xie Haiping, Director General, Guangxi Communication Administration
3. Mr. John Cooney, Director, Infrastructure Division, ADB

0920 – 0930 **Photo Session**

0930- 1115 **Session I- The GMS Information Superhighway Network (ISN)**

0930- 1000 1. Report on Outcome of First Meeting of ISN Steering Group (SG)
 - PRC Representative

1000- 1015 **Coffee Break**

1015- 1115 2. Progress of the ISN
 - Chairperson of the IG of the ISN
 - Thailand Representative

3. Work Plan of ISN SG (operating arrangements, priority activities)
 -ADB, PRC Representatives

1115- 1230 **Session II- Road Map for GMS Telecommunications Development**

1. Country Presentations of Ongoing Telecommunication Development and Sector Reform Activities and Action Plans

2. Highlight on Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam Sector Reforms/
Discussion of Action Plans (to form basis of programs of assistance of various development partners)
 - GMS Representatives, ADB

1230- 1330 **Lunch Break**

1330- 1430 **Continuation of Session II**

3. ADB Briefing on Status of Telecommunication Flagship Projects
 - ADB Representative

1430- 1530 **Session III- ICT for Development and Poverty Reduction**

1. Presentation on Findings/ Recommendations of Regional Study on Harnessing ICT for Development:
 - Discussions to be facilitated by ADB Representative
2. Highlight on Rural ICT Experiences (PRC, Lao PDR, and Cambodia)

1530- 1545 **Coffee Break**

1545- 1700 **Session IV- Development Partner Coordination in GMS Telecommunication Development**

1. Presentation on key sector initiatives:
 - Telecoms training program provided by the Ministry of Industry and Communication of PRC for GMS telecoms officials
 - E-commerce Activities (Infocomm Development Authority Singapore, International Enterprise Singapore)
 - GMS Telecoms initiatives of other development partners (JBIC, WB)
2. ICT Policy and Applications for Development
 - Mr. Guennady Fedorov, Chief, ICT Policy Section, Information, Communication and Space Technology Division, UNESCAP
3. Discussions
 - Potential for coordination of initiatives, joint program implementation (infrastructure expansion, technology sharing, innovation, ICT)
 - Timeframe for next steps

Dinner hosted by ADB (Venue to be announced)

Day 2

0900- 1030 **Session V- Future Actions for GMS Cooperation in Telecommunications Sector**

1. Recent Improvements on the GMS Development Matrix/ Updates (Telecommunication Sector)
 - ADB Representative
2. Discussion on Priority Areas of Cooperation: Information Superhighway Network Construction; Telecom Capacity Building; ICT for Development
 - PRC representative
3. Confirmation of the priority areas and way forward

1030 - 1045 **Coffee Break**

1045 -1130 **Session VI- Discussion and Adoption of Summary of Proceedings**

1130 -1200 **Session IX- Closing Session**

1. Synthesis of STCF Discussions
 - Chairperson/ Co-Chairperson

2. Closing Remarks by
 - a. Senior PRC Telecoms Official
 - b. Mr. John Cooney, Director, Mekong Infrastructure Division, ADB

1200- 1330 **Lunch**

GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION ECONOMIC COOPERATION
7th Meeting of the Subregional Telecommunications Forum (STCF-7)
30-31 March 2006
Guilin, People's Republic of China

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42. The meeting agreed that the STCF-8 would be held in Siem Reap, Cambodia sometime in the first quarter of 2007. This is subject to confirmation by the Cambodian Government.

VI. Discussion and Adoption of Summary of Proceedings

43. Mr. Jude announced the distribution of the draft summary of proceedings for review by the body. The STCF participants reviewed the draft summary of proceedings and after incorporating the suggested changes, the body therefore approved the minutes of the STCF-7 meeting.

VII. Closing Session

Closing Remarks

44. Mr. Qian noted the successful completion of the meeting and recalled the various presentations and discussions that helped deepen telecoms cooperation in the GMS, particularly in ICT application and development and telecoms capacity building. He believed that ICT development in the GMS would achieve greater success with enhanced cooperation among GMS countries. He thanked ADB for the hard work in ensuring the success of the Forum and invited everyone to enjoy the sights of picturesque Guilin.

45. Mr. Jude said the Forum had been a learning experience and was happy to note that GMS governments have committed to move forward with ISN development. He stressed that ADB would seek funding support for GMS capacity building needs and urged GMS telecoms representatives to raise with their respective focal ministries about the need to include ICT development as a priority area of ADB assistance. He said ADB would also explore selective identification and fielding of technical specialists to support prioritized training needs. He thanked the Government of PRC for the well-planned visits to the SCDMA site and for the excellent logistic arrangements in hosting the meeting.