Statement of India
Third Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific (28-30 September 2022)

Agenda Item 2(b): Enabling Resilience through Seamless and Sustainable Connectivity

Madam/Mr. Chair,

As the world is slowly recovering from the effects of Covid-19 pandemic, it is imperative to act towards rejuvenation of the global economy. International cooperation towards enhancing connectivity and opportunities in trade and commerce play a pivotal role in reviving the economy to a great extent. Connectivity is itself an economic multiplier. Covid-19 has further emphasized the need for a more resilient and reliable supply chains. Robust connectivity within and between Central and South Asia is rooted in history.

Madam/Mr. Chair,

Recognising the importance of providing energy access to every citizen, Government of India has implemented various schemes to achieve uninterrupted power supply to all households. Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (Saubhagya) was launched in October, 2017 with the objective to achieve universal household electrification. As a result of persistent efforts, 100% Village Electrification has been achieved in India with number of electrified villages increasing from 3000 in 1950 to 600,000 as on 2022.

To facilitate cross border trade of electricity, Government of India issued guidelines in December 2016. The guidelines specify the eligibility of participating entities for import/export of electricity to/from India. Export/Import is also allowed through Indian Power Exchanges. Transmission of power between neighbouring countries using Indian grid is also allowed. The Indian entities, including traders, can import or export electricity directly from entities of neighbouring countries including licensed traders of these countries.

Prime Minister of India, at the first assembly of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) in October 2018, had given the clarion call for connecting solar energy supply across borders, with the mantra of ‘One Sun One World One Grid’ (OSOWOG). This mission is poised to play a major role in harnessing the tremendous potential of solar energy and will connect 140 countries through a common grid that will be used to transfer solar power and thus will help in reducing dependency on conventional sources of energy.

Madam/Mr. Chair,

India’s National Digital Communication Policy-2018 envisions to support nation’s transition to a digitally empowered economy and society by establishment of a ubiquitous, resilient and affordable Digital Communication Infrastructure and Services including universal access of broadband for all. India is implementing BharatNet – one of the world’s largest rural optic fibre networks to connect nearly six hundred thousand (600,000) villages with broadband, facilitating digital inclusion and empowerment with overall investment of about USD 25 billion.

The initiatives taken by Government have resulted in the number of telephone subscribers reaching 1.2 Billion. India’s data usage is amongst the highest in the world in
peak consumption while mobile data price is among the lowest in the world. India has
emerged as the second-largest mobile phone manufacturer in the world. India is ahead
in real time digital financial transactions compared to any other country.

Digital Economy is powered by telecom infrastructure. India has developed a complete
technology stack for 4G and 5G telecom services. This stack is built at par with global
standards. With an objective to boost 5G ecosystem within India, Government of India
has decided to offer the use of Indigenous 5G Test-Bed free of cost to the Indian
Government recognized start-ups and MSMEs.

Madam/Mr. Chair,

The role of transport connectivity in empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and
equality in the Asia-Pacific region is significant. India is focused towards developing a
sustainable, efficient and safe road infrastructure network for accelerating regional
connectivity and inclusive socio-economic growth along with environment-friendly,
accessible, and citizen-centric mobility.

The PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan (NMP) launched in October 2021 is envisioned
to provide multi-modal connectivity infrastructure to various economic zones of the
country for seamless movement of people, supply chain, and services. As part of the PM
Gati Shakti NMP, India plans to develop 22 Greenfield Expressways, 23 other key
infrastructure projects & other highway projects and 35 Multi-Modal Logistics Parks
(MMLPs).

India is implementing the Bharatmala Pariyojana, an umbrella program for the highways
sector that focuses on optimizing efficiency of freight and passenger movement across
the country by bridging critical infrastructure gaps through effective interventions like
development of Economic Corridors, Inter Corridors and Feeder Routes, National
Corridor Efficiency Improvement, Border and International connectivity roads, Coastal
and Port connectivity roads and Greenfield expressways.

India continues to implement a number of initiatives to strengthen its road transport
connectivity and enhance regional connectivity, particularly in the Central and South-east
Asia by the way of development of road transport infrastructure, negotiating bilateral and
regional motor vehicle agreements and promoting initiatives for standardization of
transport systems. Motor Vehicles Agreements for Regional Connectivity like the
Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement, India-Myanmar-
Thailand (IMT) Motor Vehicle Agreement, are at various stages of deliberation and
subsequent implementation. India has taken a proactive initiative in connectivity with
SCO member states, which has emerged as an influential regional association in the
Eurasian region.

The Sagarmala, a flagship programme in shipping sector, was launched in 2015 to
promote port-led development in the country through harnessing India’s 7,500 km long
coastline, 14,500 km of potentially navigable waterways and strategic location on key
international maritime trade routes. The main objective of the Sagarmala Programme is
to reduce logistics cost for EXIM and domestic trade with minimal infrastructure
investment.

As a part of Sagarmala Programme, more than 800 projects at an estimated cost of
around USD 70 billion have been identified for implementation. Sagarmala projects
includes projects from various categories such as modernization of existing ports and
terminals, new ports, terminals, Roll-on/roll-off (RoRo) & tourism jetties, enhancement of port connectivity, inland waterways, lighthouse tourism, industrialization around port, skill development, technology centres, etc.

Indian Railways (IR) is working in mission mode to become the largest Green Railways in the world and is moving towards becoming a “net zero carbon emitter” before 2030. Railway Electrification which is environment friendly and reduces pollution, has increased nearly ten times since 2014. Indian Railways Dedicated Freight Corridors are being developed as a low carbon green transportation network with a long-term low carbon roadmap, which will enable it to adopt more energy efficient and carbon-friendly technologies, processes and practices.

In order to enhance regional connectivity, a new passenger train service Mitali Express between New Jalpaiguri (India) and Dhaka (Bangladesh) was recently flagged off in June 2022 to strengthen people to people connectivity. This is in addition to existing two passenger train services namely Kolkata-Dhaka-Kolkata Maitree Express and Kolkata-Khulna-Kolkata Bandhan Express.

India became a signatory to Transports Internationaux Routiers (TIR) convention in 2017 to facilitate international cross border goods transport. The Convention will help traders to have access to fast, easy, reliable and hassle-free international system for movement of goods by road or multi-modal means across the territories of other contracting parties.

Madam/Mr. Chair,

India imparts great emphasis to enhance the physical connectivity and bring greater economic benefits to all in an equitable and balanced manner. Expansion and strengthening of regional connectivity are an integral part of India’s economic and diplomatic initiatives. However, India is of the firm view that connectivity initiatives must be based on universally recognized international norms, good governance, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality. They must be pursued in a manner that respects sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Thank you.