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

Agenda Item 2(c): Towards an Inclusive Digital Future

Madam/Mr. Chair,

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) play a crucial role in economic & social development. Its role in the innovation ecosystem is now being recognized as a potential catalyst for growth in the present knowledge economy. By connecting people and places, ICTs also play a vital role in the national, regional and global development.

Madam/Mr. Chair,

India strongly believes that the Digital Foundation, along with the availability of robust and secured digital connectivity, is one of the indispensable pillars of digital transformation of any country. Global improvements in digital infrastructure, connectivity and technologies have shown humungous potential to bridge the digital divide, empowering and improving the quality of life of citizens worldwide.

Almost half the world’s population still does not have access to high-speed broadband and is hence deprived of the access to virtual platforms, tele-medicine, distance learning and e-payments. Hence it becomes crucial that we make the digital revolution inclusive by creating an environment where nobody is left behind.

India’s National Digital Communication Policy-2018 envisions to support nation’s transition to a digitally empowered economy and society by fulfilling the information and communication needs of citizens and enterprises 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. India also has National Knowledge Network (NKN) which is an innovative, cutting-edge, robust and secured network, which provides a centralized multi-gigabit high-speed digital connectivity backbone for research & educational institutions and Government Organisations spread across India.

Madam/Mr. Chair,

India is focusing on building Digital Skills across its population and has introduced digital toolkit as a part of the curriculum across Schools. Many new age courses such as Artificial intelligence and machine learning specialist, data analytics, cloud
computing, blockchain specialist, etc. have been launched, with the focus on enhancing digital literacy.

Towards the digital skills endeavour, Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan Scheme (PMGDISHA) Initiative has been launched with an objective to make 60 million people in rural areas, across the country, digitally literate, reaching to around 40% of rural households by covering one member from every eligible household.

Madam/Mr. Chair,

A universally and uniquely verifiable Digital Identity of an individual plays a pivotal role in enhancing financial inclusion & digital economy. India has implemented Aadhaar, a low cost, simple and innovative unique digital identity system to authenticate anytime, anywhere. It is the world’s largest biometric digital database covering over 1.33 billion residents including 99% of the adults. It enables targeted delivery of subsidies, benefits and services in an efficient and transparent manner.

Madam/Mr. Chair,

The potential of digital financial inclusion has been globally recognized in the recent times. In this 21st century, Digital Economy has emerged as key driver for global economic growth. Various multilateral platforms and international organisations have emphasized to reap the benefits of the digitization of financial services. India through its JanDhan programme and making concentrated efforts to push Digital Payments has made considerable strides towards Financial Inclusion.

Promotion of digital payments ecosystem is an essential aspect of Digital India programme and has the potential to transform Indian economy by extending inclusive financial services. India has implemented Unified Payment Interface (UPI), a unique payment system that helps in instant, low-cost fund transfer between two bank accounts using a mobile application. UPI has enabled increased use of Digital Payments in the country and brought in transparency, convenience and speed into a wide spectrum of digital transactions. In about 5 years since launch, its growth has eclipsed all debit and credit card payment transactions. This is reflected through numbers that in August, 2022, UPI crossed 6.5 Bn transactions whereas it was 6.2 Bn in July, 2022 and 5.8 Bn in June, 2022. UPI has 45.97 billion transactions by volume in FY 2021-22 as compared to 22.33 Bn in FY 2020-21.

Madam/Mr. Chair,

Open data has the potential to unleash innovation and transform every sector of the economy. Recognizing the importance of availability of open data and associated information to its citizens, the Government of India came out with National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP). The objective of this policy is to facilitate access to Government owned shareable data through a wide area network all over
the country in a periodically updated manner, within the framework of various related policies, acts and rules of Government, thereby permitting a wider accessibility and usage by public. NDSAP aims to provide an enabling provision and platform for proactive release for open access to the data generated by various Government entities.

**Madam/Mr. Chair,**

The CVOID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the businesses all over the world due to disruption in global value chain. On the positive side, the world has embraced digital transformation at a pace never witnessed before. The pandemic has resulted in societies and communities reimagining technology’s critical role in how we work, learn and live. India is a strong proponent of digital inclusion which a critical component for an equitable society.

**Thank you.**