



GMSARN

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 2 No. 1

Greater Mekong Subregion Academic and Research Network
www.gmsarn.org

June 2003

Chairman GMSARN International Board:

Prof. Jean-Louis
Armand, President,
Asian Institute of
Technology

Chairman GMSARN Council of Advisors:

Dr. Tong-in
Wongsothorn,
President, Sukothai
Thammatirat Open
University, Thailand

GMSARN MEMBERS

Asian Institute of
Technology

Hanoi University of
Technology, Vietnam

Ho Chi Minh City
University of
Technology, Vietnam

Institute of
Technology of
Cambodia

Khon Kaen
University, Thailand

Kunming
University of Science
and Technology,
China

National
University of Laos

Royal University
of Phnom Penh,
Cambodia

Thammasat
University, Thailand

Yangon
Technological
University, Myanmar

Yunnan University,
China

GMSARN enters second phase

Membership expansion underway

The Royal University of Phnom Penh in Cambodia and Yunnan University in Kunming, China, have joined the Greater Mekong Subregion Academic and Research Network (GMSARN), bringing the total membership to 11 institutions.

The decision to expand GMSARN's membership was reiterated at the Fourth Joint Meeting of the International Board and Council of Advisors on 3-4 April 2003. The move is in support of the broadening scope of activities in the Network's second phase (2003-2005).

The Fourth Joint Meeting also approved the formation of flexible working groups to plan specific network activities. The groups, which will be composed of representatives from GMSARN member institutions, are also expected to facilitate communications within GMSARN and to strengthen collaboration between the Secretariat and member institutions.

Reaffirming GMSARN's commitment to the development of the GMS, the Fourth Joint Meeting said that network activities in the second phase would remain focused on cross cutting issues in science and technology.



Mr. Kazu Sakai, Deputy Director General of the Mekong Department, ADB, is seen stressing a point. From left are Prof. Jean-Louis Armand, GMSARN Chairman and AIT President; and Dr. Pisan Sirithorn, Vice-President for Research and Academic Service Affairs, Khon Kaen University (representing Prof. Sumon Sakolchai, President).

Prof. Jean-Louis Armand, GMSARN Chairman and AIT President, presided over the meeting, which was held at Khon Kaen University on 5 April, followed by a field visit on the following day to the University's campus in Nong Khai. The members of the meeting proceeded to Vientiane and visited the campuses of the National University of Laos.

Prof. Armand stressed that by holding annual joint meetings in the premises of member institutions, on a rotating basis, GMSARN hopes to familiarize members of the International Board and Council with the academic offerings and facilities of member institutions.

(Please turn to page 2)

Bridging the
Digital Divide

Page 3

News from
GMSARN Members

Page 6

In Conversation with
Chanpheng Bounnaphoul

Page 8



From left: Mr. Chumnarn Pongsri, Programme Officer, Fisheries Programme, MRC; Dr. Tong-In Wongsathorn, Chairman, GMSARN Council of Advisors and President, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University; Prof. Vanchai Vatanasapt, Director, Centre for Peace and Governance, King Prajadhipok's Institute; and Prof. Gang Deng, Director of the Division of International Cooperation, Kunming University of Science and Technology.

(from page 2)

In his report, Dr. Tong-in Wongsathorn, Chairman of the Council of Advisors, thanked the members of the Board and Council for their involvement in GMSARN activities.

Professor Mario T. Tabucanon, GMSARN Director, said that GMSARN has been greatly encouraged by the support extended by major partners, including the ADB, UN-ESCAP, GMS Business Forum, and the ASEAN Foundation (Japan - ASEAN Solidarity Fund).



GMSARN Chairman Prof. Jean-Louis Armand and GMSARN Director Prof. Mario T. Tabucanon with AIT alumni, Mr. Khambay Vongsyalath of the Lao Water Supply, Mr. Vongtayfa Sisouvong of the National University of Laos, and Mr. Sisamone Kongmany, also of Lao Water Supply, during their visit to Vientiane with other members of the GMSARN International Board and Council of Advisors.

Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management

GMSARN joins Steering Committee

GMSARN is actively involved in the Phnom Penh Plan (PPP) for Development Management launched by the Asian Development Bank.

Prof. Jean-Louis Armand, GMSARN Chairman and AIT President, is a member of the PPP Steering Committee.

The Plan aims to develop a core group of development managers in government ministries who will act as change agents with the vision, skills and managerial and technical competence needed to accelerate socio-economic development. Training, partnerships, and institutional development are at the heart of the Plan.

The Steering Committee will oversee the functioning of the project. Its broad charter includes technical responsibility and broad guidance for the implementation of the training programs.

Steering Committee meetings will be held on the sidelines of ADB's Senior Officials' Meetings when all GMS national coordinators will be present.



Meeting at the Nong Khai campus of Khon Kaen University. Prof. Armand is seen with Prof. Mario Tabucanon, GMSARN Director and AIT Provost.



Mr. Grid Rangsongnoen led faculty members of the Nong Khai campus in welcoming the delegation.



From left: Prof. Pe Win, Rector of Yangon Technological University; Dr. Nguyen Than Son, Vice Rector (R&D and International Relations), HCMUT; Mr. Masato Abe, Economic Affairs Officer, UN-ESCAP; and Prof. Gang Deng of KUST.

Bridging the digital divide:

The case for inter-disciplinarity and a minimalist approach

The Regional Conference on Digital GMS provided a forum for discussions of complex, multi-faceted issues surrounding the digital divide in the GMS. The conference was organized by GMSARN and the ASEAN Foundation (Japan-ASEAN Solidarity Fund) on 26-28 February 2003.

Prof. Jean-Louis Armand, GMSARN Chairman and AIT President, emphasized that GMSARN is an initiative geared towards building self-reliance among the GMS countries by developing a strong science and technology presence in the region, and that the conference attested to this noble goal. He added that conferences such as this provide an important platform for discussions and deliberations on developmental issues in the GMS.

In his Preface to the Conference Proceedings, Dr. Peter Haddawy, Conference Chair said, "Even in the more developed countries of the GMS, a significant digital divide still exists between urban and rural populations. But an effective deployment of ICT in the region is problematic, since it requires addressing technological, economic, social, and cultural aspects."

Dr. Haddawy, a faculty member of the School of Advanced Technologies, AIT, stressed that the major goal of the conference was to explore ways and means of bridging the digital divide in the region, at the same time suggesting opportunities for positive change.

Noting that e-commerce infrastructure in the GMS is weak, with the exception of Thailand, Dr. Haddawy cited the need to address disparities, not only in terms of technology, but also in terms of commercial, legal and regulatory, and social and cultural infrastructures. Outside Thailand, GMS countries face the difficult task of enacting a legal framework for developing e-commerce. These observations are contained in a conference paper that Dr. Haddawy co-authored with Dr. Raman Manandhar, former GMSARN Research Fellow.

AIT alumni from GMS countries made significant contributions to the Conference. Myo



*Dr. Peter Haddawy,
Conference Chair*

Aung of Myanmar, collaborating with Professor Fumio Yamazaki, former faculty member of the School of Civil Engineering, AIT, examined the use of Landsat images to assess changes in urban land use patterns, identify strategies for greening Yangon and evaluate the impact of urbanization on sustainable urban environmental management in Yangon.

Men Saravuth, now back with the Royal University of Phnom Penh, collaborated with Dr. Vatcharaporn Esichaikul of the School of Advanced Technologies, AIT, in a paper on how information technology could better support the development of higher education in Cambodia. Their recommendations focused on policy recommendations for IT development at the national level, including a national IT education plan.

In her paper examining the liberalization of telecommunications in the Philippines and Thailand, Thai alumna Dr. Donyapreuth Krairit suggested non-competition-oriented policy alternatives, instead

of extensive industry liberalization, to reduce the digital divide. She stressed the need to tailor telecommunications reform policies to the pace and needs of national development, particularly in less developed countries.

The Conference Proceedings makes fascinating and essential reading, even for non-technical readers, because of the broad inter-disciplinary range of interests and perspectives of the papers presented. One such paper by Sven Mauleon director/senior consultant of the Openmindprojects/Changemaker consultancy group described a 'minimalist' approach to computer learning in third world villages. This is the approach adopted by Openmindprojects in ITInIsan, which attempts to bring the benefits of computer learning to poor children in Thailand's poorest region.

As stated in the paper, "In the third world there will never be enough resources, money, teachers or will to give the underprivileged the chance to the education required to leave poverty by using traditional education. The poor must eventually rely on their own resources, will and initiatives. Today they do have a potential ally that the western poor did not have 50-100 years ago. New technology, ICT!

"The opportunities for broad-based popular education never seemed better."



United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

The *GMSARN Newsletter* is published twice yearly, in June and December, with funding support from the Unesco Office, Jakarta.

It is produced by the GMSARN Secretariat in close coordination with the Editorial Board which is composed of contact persons appointed by each GMSARN member institution and a representative designated by the Unesco Office, Jakarta.

If you wish to be placed on our mailing list, please contact:

GMSARN Secretariat,
c/o Asian Institute of Technology, P.O. Box 4, Klong Luang,
Pathum Thani, Thailand 12120.

E-mail: gmsarn@ait.ac.th

Tel (66-2) 524-6101. Fax. (66-2) 524-5069.

The *GMSARN Newsletter* is also available at the GMSARN website: <http://www.gmsarn.org>

Opinions expressed in authored articles are not necessarily those of GMSARN.



GMS development agenda GMSARN deals with priority needs

Environmental management. Small- and medium-size enterprise development. Bridging the digital divide. Pressing needs in the GMS present challenging opportunities for timely responses. GMSARN and its partners took the following action in the first half of the year.

Closing gaps in the digital divide

Bringing the benefits of information and communications technology (ICT) to the GMS is a high priority in the region's development agenda. The situation in industrialized countries, where technological advances have vastly improved the quality, reliability and versatility of ICT, is in stark contrast to that in some developing countries with inadequate ICT facilities. The Regional Conference on Digital GMS addressed factors that foster the digital divide in the GMS.

Responding to the tasks at hand, the Regional Conference on Digital GMS disseminated new advances in ICT and their applications to economic and social development in the GMS. The conference covered four sub-themes: remote sensing and GIS applications for sustainable development; wireless and mobile technology; Internet and information technology for GMS business; and distributed learning and education.

The conference was held on 26-28 February 2003 at the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, and co-organized by GMSARN and the ASEAN Foundation (Japan-ASEAN Solidarity Fund), with support from the National Space Development Agency of Japan, UN-ESCAP/GMS Business Forum.



Mr. Takashi Moriyama of the Office of Satellite Technology, NASDA is seen being welcomed by Prof. Jean-Louis Armand, GMSARN Chairman and AIT President.

Addressing common concerns in the GMS

Human resources development, harmony between natural resource utilization and environmental management, and equitable distribution of the benefits of development were common themes in the five research proposals that were developed at the Environmental Workshop on GMS Capacity Building for Sustainable Development. The research proposals present timely responses to the need for integrated and coordinated systems to mitigate adverse environmental impacts in the GMS. The participants studied various initiatives taken by governments and relevant institutions to address social, economic and technological concerns in the GMS, and elaborated on emerging and anticipated development trends as they relate to the respective proposals.

The workshop was held at AIT on 3-4 April 2003. It was co-organized by GMSARN and the ASEAN Foundation (Japan-ASEAN Solidarity Fund). The research proposals have since been submitted to the Asian Neighbors' Network of the Toyota Foundation for funding support.

Submitted under the theme, The Reform of Social Systems: Toward Strengthening Civil Society, were two proposals: (i) Joint Research and Sharing on Border Trade, Livelihoods and Values from the Standpoint of People in the GMS Border Areas, and

Off the Press

Proceedings of the Regional Conference on Digital GMS, 26-28 February 2003. ISBN 974-229-427-5

Contains 73 papers and abstracts, representing contributions from 23 countries and international organizations.

Report of the Environmental Workshop on GMS Capacity Building for Sustainable Development, 3-4 April 2003. ISBN 974-241-746-6

Provides a concise summary of the workshop's proceedings and records major recommendations presented by participants for each concept proposal.

For further information, please visit www.gmsarn.org



Dr. Ruben Umaly, Executive Director, ASEAN Foundation, third from right, and Prof. Chongrak Polprasert, Dean of the School of Environment, Resources and Development, AIT, extreme right, are photographed with keynote speakers: Dr. Chumnarn Pongsri, Member of the GMSARN Council of Advisors and Programme Officer, Fisheries Programme, MRC; Mr. Surendra Shrestha, Regional Director and Representative for Asia and the Pacific, UNEP; Ms. Thelma Kay, Chief of Gender and Development Section, Emerging Social Issues Division, UN-ESCAP; and Prof. Hisashi Korokura of the Graduate School of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Tokyo.

(ii) Social, Economic and Environmental Impacts of the Urban System Emerging from Border Trade in the GMS.

Three other proposals, (i) Establishment of a Cleaner Technology Clearinghouse/Network for Small-and Medium-Size Enterprises in the GMS, (ii) Conservation of Aquatic Biodiversity in the GMS, and (iii) Identification of Professional and Institutional Needs for Applying Market-Based Environmental Measures (EMM) in the GMS, were submitted under the theme, The Global Environment and the Potential for Human Survival.

Boosting Laotian Entrepreneurship

A thorough understanding of key concepts in managerial economics puts entrepreneurs at an advantage when planning their operations and setting down business policies.

These concepts, including customer demand, production cost, competition environment and pricing strategy, were the focus of a training course, Managerial Economics for Lao Entrepreneurs under the GMS Business Forum, which was held at the Lao-Japan Human Resource Cooperation Centre of the National University of Laos (NUoL) in Vientiane on 20 - 21 May 2003. Much use was made of case studies, group work and small exercises during the two-day training.

The main topics included Managerial Economics, Analysis

of Consumer Demand, Analysis of Production Costs, Competitive Environment, Pricing Strategies, and Non- Pricing Strategies.

The training course was co-organized by UN-ESCAP, GMS-BF, GMSARN, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and NUoL for some 50 Laotian entrepreneurs and concerned government officials.

Into the global market through e-business

E-business has become a strategic necessity in the global market and GMS entrepreneurs keen on international business ventures stand to benefit by honing their e-business know-how.

The E-Business Workshop for Myanmar Entrepreneurs under the GMS Business Forum underscored the impact of ICT on e-business applications and practices. It was held at the Myanmar ICT Park in Yangon on 24-28 March 2003 to enable entrepreneurs from SMEs in Myanmar to learn about concepts, strategies, business models, technologies and applications of e-business/ e-commerce. Essential global issues related to e-business/ e-commerce were addressed.

Intensive training was delivered through lectures, hands-on sessions, case studies and discussions, focusing on the following topics: Internet Basics, Infrastructure (ISP, Networks); Online Selling; Online Marketing and Marketplaces; Mobile Commerce, Travel Case Studies; and Global Issues, Legal Framework, ASEAN.

The workshop was co-organized by UN-ESCAP, Japan International Cooperation Agency, GMS Business Forum, GMSARN, Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and Myanmar Computer Federation.

CONGRATULATIONS

Dr. He Tianchun, former President of Kunming University of Science and Technology (KUST), has been appointed as Director General of Provincial Education Department in Yunnan Province, China. Dr. Tianchun was a member of the GMSARN International Board in his capacity as KUST President.



NEWS FROM GMSARN MEMBERS

A milestone in Vietnam's educational system

HUT launches International Training Programme

Hanoi University of Technology inaugurated its International Training Programme on 10 March 2003, marking a milestone in Vietnam's system of education.

Speaking at the launch ceremony, University Rector Prof. Dr. Tran Quoc Thang said that the Programme responds to the growing demand for highly qualified professionals in science and technology fields. The Programme was approved by the Ministry of Education and Training and will be offered in conjunction with existing academic offerings at HUT.

Prof. Hoang Van Phong,



Prof. Tran Quoc Thang,
HUT Rector



Prof. Ha Duyen,
ITP Director

Minister of Science and Technology and former HUT Rector, has been closely involved in the development of the Programme. The 110 students currently enrolled in the Programme have been grouped into four classes that will be taught in collaboration with four foreign universities. These are the University of Hanover in Germany, Nagoya University of Technology in Japan, and Saint Pe-

tersburg Electro-technical University and Tomsk Polytechnique University, both in Russia.

The Programme also selected 3rd and 4th year students for cross enrolment at the University of Hanover. German language lessons from November 2002 to June 2003 have been offered to the students. They are scheduled to join the University of Hanover at the beginning of August 2003.

HUT plans to broaden its cooperation with other institutions of higher learning in English- and French-speaking countries. In the future, HUT proposes to make the Programme available to qualified students from other countries in the GMS, particularly those coming from GMSARN member institutions.

Attending the launch ceremony for the International Training Programme were representatives from the four partner universities, government officials and members of the Diplomatic Corps.

Promoting scientific research and technology transfer

HCMUT opens joint venture business

Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology has embarked on a joint business venture within the university system to promote scientific research and technology transfer. The Bach Khoa Construction Consultant Company is supported by capital investments from stockholders.

The company is an autonomous, for-profit organization with its own legal status and seal. A self-financing operation, the company is responsible for its own cost accounting.

Bach Khoa Construction Consultant Company applies the results of technical research carried out in the field of civil engineering by HCMUT to real construction works. Thus it provides opportunities for HCMUT teaching staff and researchers to participate in real construction activities and thereby upgrade their capabilities. In addition, the joint venture supports scientific research and brings addi-

tional benefits to improve the living standards of the University's teaching staff and researchers.

Among other activities, the Company carries out pre-feasibility and feasibility studies for projects related to construction, transportation, water works, and so on. It conducts surveys associated with geology, hydraulics and topography; supervises and evaluates construction in industrial zones, industrial parks, hi-tech zones, and other sites; manages projects; plans and constructs

water supply and transportation systems; and so on. In promoting technology transfer, the Company emphasizes the use of latest, appropriate technology.

Other HCMUT initiatives are the annual National Olympic Competition in Mathematics and another one in Information Technology. These events attract nationwide attention, particularly among students for whom victory could open doors to excellent career opportunities.

2nd International Conference on Management Education in Hanoi on 10-12 September 2003

The conference is a joint undertaking of Hanoi University of Technology and Hanoi National Economics University, and supported by the Swiss AIT Vietnam Management Development Program (SAV), AIT School of Management and other leading business schools in Vietnam. The focus of the Conference will be on (1) Strategy to master challenges of the future (2) International Co-operation and ways and means to enhance quality of management training in Vietnam (3) E-commerce and (4) Executive training.

For further information, please visit the website at <http://www.swissait.com>; Email: savconference@swissait.com

There's more to minerals

KUST Sino-Vietnamese research reveals new potentials

The potential of mineral resources along the Red River Corridor in the Sino-Northern Vietnam area is the subject of a joint research by the Geological Department, Faculty of Land Resource Engineering, Kunming University of Science and Technology (KUST) and the Institute of Geological Science, Vietnam. Using remote sensing and GIS technology, geological and tectonic settings will be studied and the best methods to develop the mineral potential in the area will be determined.

Signed in May 2003 and in effect for 3 years, the agreement was approved by the Yunnan Provincial Government and the National Center for Natural Sciences and Technology of Vietnam. The Yunnan Provincial Government is providing funding support.

In April 2003, KUST renewed its general agreement of cooperation with *Institut National des Sciences Appliquées de Lyon (INSA de Lyon)*, France, for another five years. Among the provisions under the first five-year general agreement, signed in October 1997, were joint supervision by KUST and *INSA de Lyon* of the doctoral studies of five KUST faculty members and exchange visits by teaching staff of the two institutions.

Last year, KUST signed a five-year MoA with North Carolina State University, USA, to promote the exchange of teaching staff and students and explore areas for collaborative research, special training programs and study visits for students and faculty. An on-going activity under the MoA is a joint research study on material science.

GMSARN Focal Person for ADB Technical Assistance Project

Dr. Rajendra Shrestha has been designated as GMSARN focal person in the Expert Group for the National Performance Assessment and Subregional Strategic Environment Framework Project Phase II (SEF II), a technical assistance project by the Asian Development Bank.

The First Expert Group Meeting for the project is tentatively scheduled on 8-9 July at AIT.

www.gmsarn.org

The GMSARN website provides comprehensive and latest information on GMSARN activities. The website is maintained by the GMSARN Secretariat at AIT.
Tel. (66-2) 524-6101.
Fax: (66-2) 524-5069.
Email: gmsarn@ait.ac.th

The First International Symposium on Southeast Asian Water Environment - biodiversity and water environment - will be held at AIT on 23-25 October 2003. The symposium is organized by the Research Center for Water Environment Technology at the University of Tokyo, the Southeast Asian Center for Water Environment Technology (SACWET) in the School of Environment, Resources and Development at AIT, the Alliance for Global Sustainability, and GMSARN. The symposium will focus on environmental and ecological management, dialogue between environmental scientists and policy makers, and emerging issues and environmental technologies.

For further information, please visit the symposium website at http://www.env.t.u-tokyo.ac.jp/project/asian_water/

In Progress

Needs analysis study of GMSARN member institutions

GMSARN's needs analysis study of member institutions is right on track, with consultative missions to five out of ten institutions completed by research fellow Mr. Kiran Shinde. To-date missions have been conducted at the National University of Laos (in February 2003), Hanoi University of Technology and Yangon Technological University (March 2003), Khon Kaen University (April 2003), and Institute of Technology of Cambodia (June 2003).

The findings will reflect the levels of development in the GMS countries, vis-à-vis the capabilities of GMSARN member institutions and their partners to respond to needs and challenges in the region. They will also be used in designating individual GMSARN member institutions as focal points for networking activities in GMSARN's focus areas.

The study is supported by the Education and Research Project for Sustainable Development in the GMS, funded by the Japanese Government.

The consultative missions also aim to build a better understanding of networking opportunities and their benefits and to encourage member institutions' active participation in GMSARN activities.

GMSARN's relevance is clearly suggested in the study's findings to-date. However, its impact is difficult to measure, due primarily to differences in the member institutions' level of participation in network activities within GMSARN, as well as with other universities in the region and abroad.

A common concern is the need for external assistance to train faculty and improve their teaching and research capabilities, in terms of formulating project proposals, applying appropriate research methodologies, research writing, and so on. Considering their limited capacities and the few opportunities for consultancies and training services in the region, many of the institutions surveyed prefer research collaborations to other joint activities under the GMSARN umbrella. There are considerable expectations regarding sustained funding and research support from GMSARN.

Suggestions to improve the study are solicited. Please send them to kiran@ait.ac.th



"The Forum's primary aim is to promote business activities and investment in the GMS, without putting our natural resources and the environment at risk," says Mr. Chanpeng, GMS-BF's first chairman.

GMS-BF is a non-government body that is an initiative of the national chambers of commerce and industry of five countries and one province in the GMS, namely Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and Yunnan Province in China. It was established in Bangkok in October 2000 with assistance from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

While the GMS is a rich storehouse of natural resources, it is clear that the region - as an economic force - needs strengthening. Some economies in the GMS are among the world's least developed, Mr. Chanpeng says.

A Role for GMS-BF

The GMS-BF has adopted a three-pronged approach towards achieving a sustainable future for the region: build up the capacity of the local private sector, strengthen existing linkages between local firms and foreign firms and create new ones, and enhance the public-private sector interface, including major multi-lateral agencies.

In practice, the GMS Business Forum serves as an intermediary between the public and private sectors, says Mr. Chanpeng, referring to the Forum's primary functions. Among these are periodic reviews of legislative and government policies in the GMS with the interests of the business community in mind. The GMS-BF issues opinions on the timeliness and effectiveness of such policies and works out policy alternatives. These are conveyed to GMS governments, political parties and other relevant authorities.

The GMS-BF's main services include: business advisory services; business and marketing information services; investment

In Conversation

Chanpheng Bounnaphoul

As Chairman of the GMS Business Forum (GMS-BF), Mr. Chanpheng Bounnaphoul performs a delicate balancing act: giving due attention to the concerns of private business in the Greater Mekong Subregion, while ensuring that the interest of governments and other public institutions in the region is well served.

promotion programs; export promotion programs; support to visiting trade delegations, fairs and missions; sending trade missions to foreign markets; and conducting management and vocational training courses.



These services respond to long festering problems in the GMS, such as low levels of productivity and inadequate structural reforms as governments reduce their productive participation in the economy and the business sector takes a greater role in developing the countries both economically and socially.

Transition to open economies

With the exception of Thailand, the GMS countries are still in transition from centrally planned economies to market-oriented economies. Alongside this transition, Mr. Chanpheng adds, is a gradual diversification from predominantly agriculture-based economies into several modern economic sectors.

Indeed, the GMS holds tremendous promise. "It is well endowed with resources and along with its strong agricultural base, the GMS contains vast amounts of timber, fisheries resources, a wide variety of minerals, petroleum, natural gas, coal,

and some of Asia's best potential for hydropower projects."

Contributing to Mr. Chanpheng's optimism is the human resource base, which he views as a vast potential asset because of its large size and the opportunities it offers for affordable labour. Going by its

relatively young population and above average population growth rates, the GMS has a significantly large pool of future workers and a substantial consumer market.

GMS-BF and GMSARN

Mr. Chanpeng reaffirms the direct relevance of GMSARN to the work of the GMS-BF, particularly in its efforts to reduce conflicts between environmental protection and economic development. The GMS-BF has supported many GMSARN activities, from the time of its establishment in January 2001. First and foremost, these include GMSARN's lead activity, the GMS Environmental Workshop for Sustainable Development in November 2001.

Mr. Chanpeng looks forward to greater cooperation between the GMS-BF and GMSARN, particularly in terms of skills and know-how exchanges. He has no doubt that their common goal to create prosperity in the GMS, while ensuring sustainable use of natural resources, is achievable.

Mr. Chanpeng Bounnaphoul has brought to the GMS-BF many years of experience as a senior official in the Government of Lao PDR. Shortly before retiring from the Lao PDR civil service, he was Vice-Minister of Commerce (1982-1986) and Vice Minister of Planning (1987-1989). From 1991 to 2001 he served as President of the Lao Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The GMS-BF Secretariat is currently located in Vientiane, Laos.