

His Excellency Lyonpo Damcho Dorji  
His Excellency Xu Haoliang  
Excellencies  
Distinguished participants  
Ladies and gentlemen

1 First off, allow me to convey my Ambassador's regrets for not being present today. He is unable to be here as we have a Minister visiting New Delhi during this period. That said, I wish to thank the Royal Government of Bhutan for their arrangements and hospitality. I also extend my appreciation to them for the insightful and informative presentations, including about the achievements of the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, and the priorities and challenges of the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan.

2 Singapore and Bhutan enjoy warm and friendly ties, cemented by the close personal and working relationship that our leaders share. We were pleased to welcome Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay on his visit to Singapore in November 2016, and Minister for Labour and Human Resources Ngeema Sangay Tshempo earlier this year. We remain in close touch with our Bhutanese counterparts to identify areas of mutual interest, and potential aspects of cooperation.

3 Singapore and Bhutan share many similarities and, by extension, challenges. Both are small nations with resource, population, and geographical constraints, and are susceptible to global and regional developments. Such commonalities make the sharing of development experiences and best practices all the more salient. A common thread linking both countries is the importance of human resources. We often say in Singapore that our only resource is our people. Significant attention has been committed to ensure that Singaporeans embrace the concept of lifelong learning, and consistently strive to improve themselves. Just recently we introduced the SkillsFuture movement, which encourages all Singaporeans to participate in programmes and courses to upgrade their skills. In a similar fashion, one of Bhutan's priorities is to develop the potential of its people rather than pursue pure economic achievements. It is an exemplary model of a country where development – and happiness – takes precedence.

4 It is under this context that one of Singapore's key contributions to Bhutan involves the offering of customised technical assistance programmes,

scholarships, and study visits for Bhutanese officials. Over 950 Bhutanese officials have benefitted from programmes organised under the ambit of the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP). Under the SCP, Bhutanese officials have received training in fields including finance, public administration, ICT, and economic development. I am pleased to share with participants that close to 200 officials have received training in Singapore since the last Round Table Meeting in 2013.

5 Our cooperation with Bhutan goes beyond the SCP. The erstwhile-Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) assisted with the development of Bhutan's ICT Masterplan between 2013 and 2015. Since the previous year, Singapore Polytechnic has been working with the Bhutan Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) on a three-year training programme on public sector innovation. We offer training to anti-corruption and Foreign Service officers, and our cooperation extends to sectors such as immigration and checkpoints.

6 Looking ahead, both countries are exploring the possibility of doing more in the fields of healthcare and skills. In fact, just last week a delegation from Singapore Health Services (or SingHealth) was in Bhutan to explore possible areas of collaboration in the medical sphere. ITE Education Services (or ITEES) is also in discussions with the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources on the possibility of establishing a Skills Training Centre in Thimphu.

7 The existing and prospective fields of cooperation outlined above set the stage for an expansion of our already broad levels of engagement. Singapore remains committed to assisting Bhutan in achieving its development goals, and we look forward to working more closely with Bhutan towards this end.

8 Thank you.

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