

Statement
by
His Excellency Mr. Vijavat Isarabhakdi
Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand
at the Fourteenth Round Table Meeting (RTM)
on 14 March 2019, Thimphu, Kingdom of Bhutan

Your Excellency Lyonchhen Dr. Lotay Tshering,
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan,
Honourable Co-Chairs,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, who sends his best wishes for the success of this meeting. At the outset, allow me to express my deep appreciation to the Royal Government of Bhutan for the very warm hospitality extended to me and the members of my delegation ever since we arrived in this paradise on earth.

For myself, this is the second time I have had the privilege of visiting this beautiful “Land of the Thunder Dragon”. It is a great pleasure for me to be here again, after a span of 14 years, to participate in this Fourteenth Round Table Meeting. It is a very timely opportunity for the Thai delegation to witness the remarkable progress Bhutan has made along its socio-economic development course. We are also highly interested in learning more about Bhutan’s strategic framework for achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and how this endeavour has been managed. Indeed, we have gained much from our participation.

Thailand and Bhutan have been development cooperation partners for more than two decades. Both countries have many things in common, including some similar socio-economic backgrounds and values. For our part, Thailand, in the past, has learned how to tackle our problems through a combination of our own domestic wisdom coupled with some external assistance from our development partners. Bhutan is currently also proceeding along the same process.

Thailand is, therefore, pleased to share with our Bhutanese

colleagues our home-grown experiences regarding the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) of His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej. At the same time, we also seek to learn more about Bhutan's concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Both philosophies, which share many similar fundamental values, are wisdoms that have been bestowed by the great Kings of both our countries.

As we both proceed along our respective development paths, let me say that Thailand remains firmly committed to further enhancing Bhutan's capacity for human resource and institution building. We hope that this will play a part in helping Bhutan to achieve its Gross National Happiness (GNH) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in harmony and synergy under the country's 12th Five-Year Plan (2019-2023).

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past decades, we are very pleased that Bhutanese officials have availed themselves of various fellowship and scholarship programmes extended by Thailand in a wide range of fields. These include education, engineering, medicine, public health, agriculture, community development and tourism. All told, I understand that over a thousand officials from Bhutan have had the opportunity to learn from Thailand's experiences in these fields.

Thailand considers that people-to-people contacts are of utmost importance. For this reason, we have sought to build bridges for closer engagement between our two peoples. Thailand has provided opportunities for young Thai volunteers to exchange skills and experiences with their counterparts in various Bhutanese government agencies under the "Friends from Thailand" Programme. Since 2008, a total of 74 young Thai volunteers have been dispatched to Bhutan. Four of them are still currently on various assignments in Bhutan and thoroughly enjoying the experience.

A number of development cooperation projects have been recently implemented. The One Gewog, One Product (OGOP) Development Project is one of our development flagship projects with Bhutan. It was initiated in 2013 by the Queen's Project Office of Bhutan, aimed at enhancing the Kingdom's indigenous work and making Bhutanese products available in the domestic and international markets. This project has significantly helped in finding new markets for Bhutanese goods and improving the livelihoods of the rural people.

Thailand is delighted to see the remarkable progress made by the OGOP Project since its implementation, bringing benefits to some 400 families in 80 Gewogs. Furthermore, many selected products under the OGOP Project were exhibited at Thailand's own OTOP Fairs, at year end in both 2017 and 2018. They received a highly positive response from Thai buyers and consumers.

I am pleased to note that, with the aim of expanding the tangible outcome of the OGOP Project, the Queen's Project Office (QPO) and the Thailand International Cooperation Agency, or TICA, have agreed to continue onwards to the second phase of our development cooperation regarding "Establishment of a Sustainable Community Development Model based on the Application of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy for the One Gewog One Product (OGOP) Project" at a number of selected villages in Bhutan. This project would directly respond to one of the priorities of Bhutan's 12th Five-Year Plan in strengthening the grassroots economy through economic diversification.

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tourism plays a very significant part in the Thai economy and there is no denying that a very large number of people from all over the world would love to enjoy the natural beauty of Bhutan as well. That is why the Prime Ministers of Thailand and Bhutan committed in July last year to promote tourism of the two countries under the theme "Two Kingdoms, One Destination". Towards, this end, Thailand, through TICA, will further support a Community-based Tourism Promotion project in which some selected villages will be strengthened as a model tourist attraction.

With health as a very important issue for the welfare of our peoples, Thailand has also committed to support the implementation of the Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat (EENT) Care Center in Bhutan. This is aimed not only at treating patients in general but also building the capacity of Bhutanese medical personnel.

In addition, during the 14th to the 17th of this month, TICA is dispatching a parallel mission of Thai medical experts to Bhutan to formulate a medium-term Bhutan-Thailand Development Cooperation Programme on Health Services and Education. This programme aims to strengthen the capacity building of Bhutan's medical services and human capacity of the

public sector in direct response to the priorities of the 12th Five-Year Plan in improving the quality of Bhutan's health and education services.

Honourable Prime Minister,
Co-Chairs,
Distinguished Delegates,

In closing, I would like to highlight with great pleasure that this year marks the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Thailand and Bhutan. Therefore, I wish to reaffirm that Thailand is more than ready to expand our collaboration with Bhutan in any way possible. We are also committed to joining with other development partners at this gathering to support Bhutan in its implementation of “*the last mile plan*” towards *LDC graduation*.” as the Kingdom moves ever closer towards reaching this important milestone.

I have every confidence that Bhutan will steadily implement its 12th Five Year Plan in coordination with its development partners and in accordance with the proactive discussions held during these two days of sessions. Together, we will help ensure that the goals set by Bhutan for the year 2023 will be successful and attain the outcomes desired.

Thank you. *Tashi Delek*.
