

Special Article

Strengthening India's Digital Connectivity with the Lower Mekong Countries

The Lower Mekong sub-region offers imminent opportunities for India to develop its digital presence in Southeast Asia. India has taken some initial steps to promote digital engagement with the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) partners, such as helping regional countries promote digital connectivity in rural areas and joining the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS). It appears that India's approach is relatively meager compared to other major powers. To increase India's competitiveness, policymakers should prioritize investing in digital infrastructure in Mekong countries and circumvent the bureaucratic hurdles in aid delivery.

“The Next Big Frontier” in India's Engagement with Southeast Asia

India considers digital connectivity the next big frontier in its engagement

with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). At both the 2019 and 2020 India-ASEAN Summits, Indian Prime Minister reiterated the importance of enhancing physical and digital connectivity with ASEAN under India's 'Act-East' policy. Against this backdrop, digital cooperation between India and the other members of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) — Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar — has gained renewed traction. The MGC Plan of Action (2019-2022) promotes the “exchange of experiences and information on policies and management regulations of the ICT industry, popularisation of public services, development of ICT infrastructure, e-governance, e-commerce, e-education and other related e-services” (MEA, 2019). At the 11th MGC meeting in 2021, India expressed its intention to enhance relations with the Mekong sub-region through not just physical, but also digital, economic, and people-to-people connectivity.

Three trends underline India's pursuit of greater digital connectivity with the MGC partners. First, mainland Southeast Asia is increasingly becoming an important knot in the regional and global supply chain, recording an annual growth of around 7 per cent – higher than ASEAN's average. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed Mekong countries to embrace digital transformation as a driver for economic growth and an impetus for implementing the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025. Finally, strategically, India has sought to boost ties with Southeast Asian states to counterweight China's growing clout in its backyard.

India's Digital Cooperation with MGC Partners

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, India has taken some initial steps to promote digital connectivity with the MGC partners. In 2015, India announced a

Table 1: Digital Infrastructure of the Lower Mekong Countries: 2020

| Country | Mobile cellular subscription (per 100 people) | Share of the population using the Internet (%) | Fixed broadband subscription (per 100 people) |
|----------|---|--|---|
| Vietnam | 141.23 | 68.7 | 15.35 |
| Thailand | 186.16 | 66.65 | 14.52 |
| Cambodia | 129.92 | 40.55 | 1.12 |
| Lao PDR | 60.84 | 25.51 | 1.06 |
| Myanmar | 113.84 | 23.62 | 0.24 |

Source: Authors' compilation, based on data available at Our World in Data

Line of Credit (LoC) of US\$ 1 billion for ASEAN to promote projects that support physical and digital connectivity. Subsequently, to kick-start the credit line, India gave a grant of US\$ 40 million to CLMV (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam) countries to implement digital connectivity projects.

Under the 'Digital Village Project', India has been sharing its expertise in telecommunications with neighbouring countries, aiming to facilitate digital development in suburban areas and provide access to various ICT services. Accordingly, India has extended a grant of US\$ 10 million to each CLMV country to implement the project. India's commitment to promoting broadband connectivity with the CLMV will help to narrow the existing gaps in digital infrastructure in continental Southeast Asia (see Table 1).

In another effort to enhance connectivity with the MGC partners, in 2019, India became the development partner of the Thailand-led Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), a cooperation framework among the five mainland Southeast Asian countries. Under the vision of "Building ACMECS Connect by 2023", the group seeks to promote seamless multidimensional connectivity (hardware, software and digital platforms) in the Mekong sub-region.

Competition Ahead for India

China's Digital Silk Road - the digital arm of the Belt and Road - has a much more extensive scope of cooperation in terms of policy coordination, facilities connectivity, trade facilitation, financial integration, and people-to-people exchange. Moreover, with the emergence of various major power-led initiatives in the Mekong sub-region in the past few years, India will have to compete with not just China but also other countries aiming for their increasing presence in the sub-region. The United States, Japan, South Korea, and the European Union are rapidly increasing cooperation with the Lower Mekong countries on a wide range of topics, including digital economy and technological innovations. India will fall behind in this intensifying competition if it

fails to offer attractive terms to Southeast Asian countries.

What Can India Do?

To leverage its competitive strengths, India should broaden its ties in consonance with the MGC partners, as well as with the rest of ASEAN, in the development of digital infrastructure.

First, the rapid growth of digital connectivity offers new avenues to improve the productivity of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) across ASEAN. The OECD report titled "Promoting the Productivity of SMEs in ASEAN countries" highlights the absence of financial and technical expertise among SMEs on integrating digital technologies in business models. In 2020, India outpaced China in the number of digital payments, and it is predicted that the value of digital payments in India will reach US\$ 1 trillion by 2026 (Iyer, 2021). Thus, India could develop partnerships with the Mekong countries on empowering SMEs to adopt digital transformation in businesses, which will encourage Indian Fintech companies to invest in the sub-region.

Second, in parlance with the ASEAN vision of MPAC 2025, India could support the Mekong countries to adopt the Modular Open-Source Identity Platform (MOSIP). Developed by the International Institute of Information Technology Bangalore (IIIT-B), the MOSIP is an open-source identity platform that helps governments create their own digital identity system with minimal cost and limited privacy concerns. The Mekong countries could also use the MOSIP to upgrade their digital infrastructure, which could improve public delivery systems and digital payment systems, and help startups adopt digitalisation.

Finally, India should try to make its LoCs more attractive. India's limited experience in providing LoCs in digital connectivity projects coupled with lack of personnel, cumbersome procedures and rigid terms and conditions could make countries in the Mekong take up LoCs with better offers from other countries. For example, in 2017, officials from Myanmar informed their Indian counterparts that India's credit line offers were not as appealing as China's, which included a

promise of technology transfer. (Singh, 2018) India could make LoCs more adaptable for the developing countries by strengthening the monitoring system, crafting flexible and adaptive terms and conditions, and better interest rates.

Concluding Remarks

The Mekong sub-region offers immense opportunities for India to enhance its presence in Southeast Asia through digital connectivity, especially contextualizing India's absence in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Greater digital engagement with MGC partners on upgrading digital infrastructure will help India compete with other major powers in this field. ■

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Views expressed in this article are authors' own. Usual Disclaimers apply.

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Digital Connectivity and Infrastructure in MGC: A Briefing

Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Mr. Prak Sokhonn and the Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar co-chaired the 11th MGC Ministerial Meeting on 21 July 2021. Mr. Prak Sokhonn emphasized on the projects and activities undertaken in the fields of health, education, environment and culture. He also noted the importance of mutual trust to ensure socio-economic development and well-being of the people in the region. The Cambodian minister also mentioned about the Asian Traditional Textile Museum (AITM) that was established in Cambodia in 2014 to demonstrate the rich heritage in textile in the Mekong-Ganga region. Beside this, India also provides the ITEC scholarships to the MGC countries in the areas of culture, tourism, engineering, management, teachers training; film directing, sound, lighting and stage management. India also runs software development and training centers and capacity building programmes in law enforcement, financial markets, ICT and space. From the Indian side, Dr. S. Jaishankar noted the importance India attaches to the Mekong countries. The minister also recommended that MGC should aim for new areas of cooperation to include digital, economic and people-to-people connectivity. In the ministerial meeting, the MGC Plan of Action 2019-22 was also circulated among the member countries.

Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and Digital Connectivity

The MGC Plan of Action 2019-22 is the third of its kind following the Hanoi POA 2001-07 and MGC POA 2016-18. In the third POA, the word 'digital connectivity' features under the theme of educational cooperation so that cooperation in this area can be enhanced through ICT infrastructure development and capacity building programmes. Additionally, the transport and communication section have two points relevant for digital connectivity:

(1) Promoting exchange of experiences and information on policies and management regulations of ICT industry, popularization of public services, development of ICT infrastructure, e-governance, e-commerce, e-education and other related e-services.

(2) Enhancing connectivity and cross-border ICT services to promote e-commerce as well as social and cultural exchanges.

The need to utilize digital platforms to facilitate cooperation and collaborations to allow scholars and subject experts to study ancient texts and scripts, art and culture, history, religion was reiterated at the International Conference on Twenty Years of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation in November 2020, jointly organised by the ICWA and ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS, New Delhi.

Besides, India has also started a project of US\$ 50,000 titled "Building Capacity on Digital Public Services Implementation and Cyber Security for Government Agencies" in Cambodia in the financial year 2020-21. This comes under Quick Impact Projects, funded by the Government of India in CLMV (Cambodia-Lao PDR-Myanmar-Vietnam) sub-region.

Digital Profile of MGC Countries

Internet World Stats (2021) indicates that Thailand is ranked fifth at the global level in the criterion of fastest internet connectivity (fixed lines) speed. India, Vietnam and Thailand also feature in the top 20 countries in the world for their large number of internet users. In India, around 54.2 per cent of the population uses internet which constitute around 27.3 per cent of the total internet users in Asia. In Lao PDR, around 52.1 per cent of the total population has access to the internet and that comprises around 1 per cent of the total internet users in Asia. The figure is almost same for Myanmar with 52.1 per cent of the total population in the country having access to internet which make up to around 1 per cent of the total internet users in Asia. Internet

penetration is highest in Thailand among the MGC countries with almost 83.6 per cent of the national population enjoying access to internet. However, Thailand only contributes 2.1 per cent to the number of total internet users in Asia. Vietnam stands second in the MGC region in internet penetration with 77.4 per cent of the Vietnamese having access to internet. Vietnam contributes around 2.1 per cent of the total Asian internet users. Last but not the least, Cambodia ranks third in the MGC region with 73.4 per cent people accessing internet which constitutes around 0.4 per cent of the total Asian internet users. (Internet World Stats 2021)¹

According to International Telecommunication Unit's (ITU) 2021 report, the Least Developed Countries in the MGC region, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar, have quite higher rates in occupying mobile phones. Approximately 93, 92 and 82 per cent of the total population in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar have mobile phones, respectively. Improving digital connectivity and ICT infrastructure come under the Target 9.C of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that calls for "significantly increased access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in Least Developed Countries by 2020".² One issue with access to mobile internet stands as expensive mobile phones and un-affordability of the smart phones in the LDCs. For example, in Cambodia, smart phones are as expensive as US\$ 60 per set, which made it unaffordable by many Cambodians in the year 2020.³ Another problem with the internet use in the MGC region counts as lack of skills by the users. In 2017, ITU conducted a survey where only 7 and 12 per cent of the female and male internet users reported to having required skill sets for the use of internet.⁴ Henceforth, the MGC countries need to address problems like high cost of purchasing internet connectivity, expensive smart phones and lack of skills to use internet to overcome some of the challenges in digital connectivity.

Table 1: Digital Profile of ASEAN Countries, January 2022

| Country | Population (Million) | Urban Population (%) | Rural Population (%) | Internet User (Million) | Social Media Statistics (Million) | Cellular Mobile Connections (Million) |
|-----------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Lao PDR | 7.43 | 37.6 | 62.4 | 3.80 | 3.80 | 5.91 |
| Myanmar | 55.02 | 31.8 | 68.2 | 25.28 | 20.75 | 73.48 |
| Cambodia | 17.06 | 25.1 | 74.9 | 13.44 | 12.60 | 22.06 |
| Brunei | 443.5* | 78.8 | 21.2 | 421.3* | 516.5* | 572.3 |
| Vietnam | 98.56 | 38.7 | 61.3 | 72.10 | 76.95 | 156.0 |
| Thailand | 70.01 | 52.8 | 47.2 | 54.50 | 56.85 | 95.60 |
| The Philippines | 111.8 | 48.0 | 52.0 | 76.01 | 92.05 | 156.5 |
| Malaysia | 32.98 | 78.2 | 21.8 | 29.55 | 30.25 | 42.11 |
| Indonesia | 277.7 | 57.9 | 42.1 | 204.7 | 191.4 | 370.1 |
| Singapore | 5.92 | 100.0 | - | 5.45 | 5.30 | 8.70 |

*Taken in '000

Source: Digital 2022, datareportal.com

Recommendations

- Enhanced digital connectivity and infrastructure will increase productivity, will add values to the digital economic activities and it serves as a foundation for Industrial Revolution 4.0.
- A well-connected national, regional and international digital connectivity networks (4G/5G) will serve as a backbone to the countries' requirements in transport and communications.
- If a country wishes to be mapped in the world of top-priority destinations by the investors and production-manufacturing houses, and regional and global value chains, it has to improve its digital connectivity and infrastructure.
- Improved digital landscape needs national planning and investments in data storage and processing, services and applications and the interfaces including terminals and devices. This will also help the MGC sub-region to identify the gaps and enhance its digital infrastructure through market researches and feasibility studies.
- Improved digital infrastructure ecosystem in the MGC sub-region will also involve external stakeholders, especially Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) and Asian Development Bank (ADB). Due to the close geopolitical proximity of the MGC sub-region with countries like China and Japan, the grouping

needs to design a win-win roadmap to gain benefits from the mentioned international financial corporations and countries in the best possible way.

Conclusion

For a sustainable digital infrastructure, the MGC countries may adopt the Four-A's approach which includes Availability, Affordability, Appetite and Ability (ITU 2021; AIIB 2020). Countries need to assess their gaps in digital infrastructure and create common avenues to make a comprehensive plan to help each other in narrowing those gaps. Southeast Asian LDCs and South Asian countries constantly face the problem of investments in enhancing their own digital connectivity. At the MGC level, the grouping may like to take insights and directions from the ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2025, which serves as a guideline for the ASEAN countries in digital connectivity.

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Views expressed in this article are author's own. Usual Disclaimers apply.

Endnotes

- Data obtained from Internet World Stats, at <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm>, data for mid-2021.
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⁴ Ibid.

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Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Activities

Address by the External Affairs Minister at the Celebration of 5th Anniversary of India-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2016-2021)

Our development partnership is another noteworthy aspect of our ties. India has shared its experience in the fields of IT, science & technology, defence, agriculture, and space. We have contributed to both institution building and human resource development in Vietnam. Under the Mekong Ganga Cooperation framework, India has been implementing Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in Vietnam, numbering 37 in 33 provinces to date. These projects are not only bringing benefits to the local community, but also helping Vietnam in reaching its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The close friendship between India and Vietnam is underpinned by its two millennia old historical and cultural linkages. The Archaeological Survey of India has been a particularly effective vehicle to rediscover these roots. Many of you would recall the recent finding of a 9th century monolithic Shiva Linga by ASI

experts at the My Son Temple complex. As the virtual summit decided, in December last year, we intend to expand our activities now to cover another block of the Cham Temple at My Son, the Dong Duong monastery at Quang Nam and the Nhan Cham Tower at Phu Yen.

India's Act East Policy has been the guiding principle of our engagements with ASEAN partners and Vietnam is no exception. The success of this policy has led us to adopt a larger Indo-Pacific approach that captures India's growing strategic interests more effectively. From the Indian perspective, Vietnam is a key partner both in the ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific context. We already have a substantial agenda underway whether it is in commerce, connectivity or culture. Our political and defence cooperation has also been steadily growing. These can be further buttressed by interaction between the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative that has been proposed by India.

The last five years of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership have been very productive. The next decade must be even more so. At a time of global uncertainty and post-Covid economic recovery, the India-Vietnam partnership will be a significant stabilizing factor in the Indo-Pacific. Keeping our national ambitions and global responsibilities in mind, we must forge ahead. It is most appropriate that this important anniversary is marked by the presence of such a high-level delegation from Vietnam. The message that this sends of our friendship will surely resonate.

Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister, Government of India

(Excerpted from Ministry of External Affairs, 17 December 2021)

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Keynote Address by Dr Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs at 3rd International Conference on ASEAN-India Cultural and Civilisational Links (October 7, 2021)

ASEAN region has immense wealth in the form of historical monuments which stand witness to our common cultural heritage. Preservation and restoration of this historical treasure is a priority in our cultural cooperation. The restoration of cultural/ heritage sites in the region has added a new dimension to India and ASEAN's multifaceted and excellent relations in the region. Prominent among them have been the restoration of Angkor Vat in Cambodia, Ta Prohm temple in Cambodia and Wat Phou temple in Lao PDR, Cham monuments in Vietnam. Efforts are ongoing to piece the heritage of the past and convert them to living monuments drawing the attention of scholars and tourists across the world.

The ancient socio-cultural relations and linkages have also found contemporary expression in the form of the Mekong Ganga Cooperation, a sub-regional grouping aimed at reviving cooperation between the peoples of the Mekong and Ganga river basins in the fields of tourism, education, culture and people-to-people contacts. An MGC Museum of Asian Textiles has been set up in Siem Reap, Cambodia, not far from the famous Angkor Wat, showcasing affinities in our weaving and textiles.

I acknowledge the valuable contributions of the past 2 editions of the International Conference on ASEAN-India Cultural and Civilizational links to the enrichment of the socio-cultural pillar of

the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership. I extend my appreciation to the organizers of this event – ASEAN India Centre, RIS, New Delhi and the Vietnam Institute for Indian and Southwest Asian Studies (VIISAS) at Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS) for the broad range of issues that would be taken up for discussion during this Conference. I wish the participants all the best for the Conference.

Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs, Government of India

(Excerpted from Ministry of External Affairs, 7 October 2021)

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Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Activities

Opening Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the 11th Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) Meeting

I would like to begin today's meeting by congratulating all the MGC member states on the successful completion of 20 years of Mekong Ganga Cooperation. I would like to take this opportunity to express, India's deep appreciation to you and your governments for the excellent and fruitful cooperation we have had over the last two decades. I would also like to convey my compliments to Cambodia for their efforts in organizing today's meeting as MGC Co-Chair, and having maintained the continuity of MGC process despite the COVID related difficulties.

The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation stands on a strong foundation of shared geographical, historical and civilizational ties between our six countries. This oldest sub-regional cooperation is as much a celebration of our long and rich history of trade, cultural and people-to-people

exchanges as it is a vehicle to advance modern day cooperation to bring progress and prosperity to our people.

During our last ministerial meeting in Bangkok in 2019, we agreed to commemorate the 20th anniversary of MGC in a befitting manner. However, much of the celebrations, especially in physical format have been postponed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. But I am happy to note that today will inaugurate the MGC Website and a video documentary highlighting the cultural, historical, religious, social and economic bonds that we share with each other.

For India, the Mekong region is of great importance. India seeks multi-dimensional engagement with the Mekong countries. We need to broaden the base of our partnership by identifying newer areas of cooperation. We aim to promote connectivity in the region in the

broadest sense of the term including not just physical but also digital, economic, and people-to-people connectivity.

We are into the second year of dealing with the pandemic related disruption. Our experience shows that the virus does not respect national boundaries. It is therefore necessary that the response to the pandemic is also collective and collaborative. We need to work together to find ways how the MGC partnership can lend its strength to the fight against the pandemic. I look forward to our discussion today.

Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister, Government of India (Excerpted from Ministry of External Affairs, 21 July 2021)

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11th MGC-MM

Photo courtesy: Khmer Times and Greatermekongsubregion.org

News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

Visit of Foreign Secretary Mr. Harsh Vardhan Shringla to Myanmar

Foreign Secretary was on a working visit to Myanmar from December 22 to 23, 2021. During his visit, he called on the Chairman, State Administrative Council and other senior representatives and held meetings with members of civil society and political parties, including the National League for Democracy. He was also scheduled to meet Myanmar-based Ambassadors, and representatives of the UN.

During his meetings with all concerned, Foreign Secretary emphasized India's interest in seeing Myanmar's return to democracy at the earliest; release of detainees and prisoners; resolution of issues through dialogue; and complete cessation of all violence. He reaffirmed India's strong and consistent support to the ASEAN initiative and expressed hope that progress would be made in a pragmatic and constructive manner, based on the five point consensus.

Emphasizing that India shares a long border with Myanmar, Foreign Secretary conveyed India's continued humanitarian support for the people of Myanmar. In the context of Myanmar's fight against the

Covid-19 pandemic, he handed over one million doses of "Made in India" vaccines to the Myanmar Red Cross Society. A part of this consignment would be utilized for communities living along Myanmar's border with India. A grant of 10,000 tons of rice and wheat to Myanmar was also announced.

Foreign Secretary expressed India's continued support for people-centric socio-economic developmental projects, including those along the India-Myanmar border areas, as well as India's commitment for expeditious implementation of ongoing connectivity initiatives such as the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project and the Trilateral Highway. Foreign Secretary also reiterated India's commitment to continue with the projects under Rakhine State Development Programme and Border Area Development Programme for the benefit of the people of Myanmar.

The visit also provided an opportunity to raise matters relating to India's security, especially in the light of the recent incident in Churachandpur district in southern Manipur. Foreign Secretary stressed the need to put an end to

any violence and maintain peace and stability in the border areas. Both sides reiterated their commitment to ensure that their respective territories would not be allowed to be used for any activities inimical to the other.

India shares an approximately 1700 kms long border with Myanmar. Any developments in that country have a direct impact on India's bordering regions. Peace and stability in Myanmar remain of utmost importance to India, specifically to its North Eastern Region.

As a democracy and close neighbour, India has been involved in the democratic transition process in Myanmar and in this context has worked with various stakeholders in developing capacities on democratic systems and practices. India proposes to renew these efforts for Myanmar to emerge as a stable, democratic, federal union in accordance with the wishes of the people of Myanmar.

(Excerpted from Ministry of External Affairs, 23 December 2021)

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Handover Ceremony for the Final Phase of the Project for Supply and Installation of 1500 Hand Pumps for Augmentation of Rural Water Supply in Cambodia

A virtual ceremony to handover the final phase of the Project for "Supply and installation of 1500 hand pumps for augmentation of Rural Water Supply in Cambodia" was held in September 2021. The ceremony was presided over by Minister of State of External Affairs, Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh and the Minister of Rural Development, Royal Kingdom of Cambodia, H.E. Dr. Ouk Rabun. The implementation of the Project

was financed by Government of India through a 100% grant. This entailed supply and installation of 1500 Hand pumps in 2 Provinces of Cambodia, namely Tboung Khmum and Banteay MeanChey. A rural population of nearly 4,00,000 in 433 villages are benefited by this project and has led to increase in population coverage with safe drinking water from 27 per cent to 40 per cent.

The Project is a reflection of the strong Bilateral Development Cooperation between India and Cambodia. India looks forward to being a vital partner in Cambodia's economic development, through continuation of capacity building efforts, financial support in terms of grants & concessional loans.

(Excerpted from Ministry of External Affairs, 27 September 2021)

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News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

Cambodian and Indian Foreign Minister Meet to Discuss Major Issues

As Cambodia and India marks the 70th anniversary of cooperation in 2022, Deputy Prime Minister and Cambodian Foreign Minister, Prak Sokhon, and Indian Foreign Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, met to discuss the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation as well as Myanmar's situation. The Deputy Prime Minister said that Cambodia appreciates India's active contribution to the Mekong region and sincerely hopes that India will overcome the Covid-19 situation in the country. He also said that as a neighbour of Myanmar, India is closely monitoring

the situation there and appreciates the important role of Cambodia as the chair of ASEAN this year. India remains committed to financing the Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) for Cambodia and other surrounding countries to bring about results that will contribute to the improvement of livelihood of residents of the sub-region. Under the QIP's around 68 projects worth \$3.4 million have been implemented from 2016-2020.

(Excerpted from www.khmertimeskh.com on January 11, 2022)

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Cabinet Approves MoU between India and Myanmar in the Field of Health Research

The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi was apprised of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), India and the Department of Medical Research (DMR), Ministry of Health and Sports of Myanmar signed on February, 2020 at New Delhi.

The objective of this MoU is to build on the health research relationship in the topics of mutual research. The main objectives are: a) Elimination of infectious diseases (to be decided mutually), b) Development of network platform of emerging and viral infections, c) Training /capacity building in research methodology management, clinical trials, ethics etc. and d) Harmonization of regulatory mechanism.

Commitment of funds for workshops/meetings and research projects will be decided from time to time as per the funds available at that time. The Parties shall establish a Joint Working Group (JWG) consisting of delegates from each organization. JWG sessions shall be held alternatively in India and in Myanmar. The expenses related to travel, including visa entry, accommodation, per diem, health insurance, local transportation of its JWG members, shall be borne by the Sending Party whereas the organizational expenses of the JWG meetings shall be borne by the Host Party.

(Excerpted from www.pib.gov.in on June 30, 2021)

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India Provides 10 lakh Doses of COVID-19 Vaccines, 10,000 tonnes of Rice and Wheat to Myanmar

India has provided 10 lakh doses of 'Made in India' coronavirus vaccines and a grant of 10,000 tonnes of rice and wheat to Myanmar as part of its continued humanitarian support for the neighboring country, according to the India's External Affairs Ministry. The assistance was announced during the visit of Foreign Secretary, Shri Harsh Vardhan Shringla, to Myanmar, the first such high-level outreach from India.

Further in a statement, it was emphasized that as India shares a long border with Myanmar, Foreign Secretary conveyed India's continued humanitarian support for the people of Myanmar, in their fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, he handed over one million doses of "Made in India" vaccines to the Myanmar Red Cross Society. A part of this consignment would be utilised for communities living along Myanmar's border with India. A grant of 10,000 tonnes of rice and wheat to Myanmar was also announced.

During his two-day visit, the Foreign Secretary called on the Chairman, State Administrative Council General Min Aung Hlaing and other senior representatives

and held meetings with members of civil society and political parties, including the National League for Democracy. He expressed India's continued support for people-centric socio-economic developmental projects, including those along with the India-Myanmar border areas, as well as India's commitment for expeditious implementation of ongoing connectivity initiatives such as the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project and the Trilateral Highway. He also reiterated India's commitment to continue with the projects under the Rakhine State Development Programme and Border Area Development Programme for the benefit of the people of Myanmar. India shares an approximately 1700-km-long border with Myanmar. Any developments in that country have a direct impact on India's bordering regions. Peace and stability in Myanmar remain of utmost importance to India, specifically to its North Eastern Region, the statement said.

(Excerpted from www.economicstimes.indiatimes.com on December 23, 2021)

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News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

Cambodia PM Hun Sen Receives First Dose of Made in India COVID-19 Vaccine

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen along with the First Lady and other senior government officials received the first dose 'Made in India' Covishield COVID-19 vaccine, which has been developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University and is produced by Serum Institute of India. In the past few months, India has stepped-up its vaccine diplomacy in the region and beyond by supplying COVID-19 vaccine jabs to partner nations, prioritizing neighbors such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar,

Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, and Seychelles. As of last week, India had supplied 46 million vaccine doses to the global community, of which 7.1 million were supplied as grants and the rest on a commercial basis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, India has emerged as one of the key responders to the health crisis, living up to its title of "world's pharmacy".

(Excerpted from www.republicworld.com on March 10, 2021)

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India-Vietnam Signs "Letter of Intent" for Enhanced Cooperation in the Postal Sector

In line with the comprehensive strategic and economic partnership and growing relations between the Republic of India and Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, the Ministers of the two countries signed a "Letter of Intent" for enhanced cooperation in the Postal Sector. The Letter of Intent recognizes the joint objectives of both the countries to facilitate cooperation in the field of posts and telecom promote sharing of information and experience, cooperate to implement projects in human resource development and to promote enhanced cooperation of postal designated operators and service providers of both the countries.

Shri Devusinh Chauhan, India's Minister of State for Communications stated that India has been witnessing exceptional growth in the field of Post and Telecommunications. He apprised that the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, has mandated Department of Telecommunications to take optical fibres to all 6 lacs

villages of the country to bridge the digital divide. Recent telecom reforms in the country will unleash the true potential of the sector to take it to the next level. Viet Nam appreciated the efforts of India for developing indigenous 5G network under "AtmaNirbhar Bharat". Vietnamese Minister of Information and Communications, HE Mr Nguyen Manh Hung suggested that India should collaborate in the field of 5G to produce world class India has been developing indigenously designed 5G telecom equipment.

The Indian Minister highlighted that signing of the Letter of Intent will provide new opportunities to both the countries in the field of Communications and Posts. Shri Vineet Pandey, Secretary (Posts) and Mr Trieu Minh Long, Director General of International Cooperation Department, MIC, Vietnam were also present during the discussions.

(Excerpted from www.pib.gov.in on December 17, 2021)

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Parliamentary Delegation from Vietnam Calls on the Hon'ble President of India

A Parliamentary Delegation from Vietnam led by H.E. Mr Vuong Dinh Hue, the Chairman of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, called on the Hon'ble President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Welcoming the delegation to India, the President said that India and Vietnam enjoy excellent relations at the leadership level in the contemporary time. Our people cherish the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and President Ho Chi Minh. Today, our bilateral Comprehensive Strategic Partnership covers wide range of areas – from political engagement to trade and investment ties, energy cooperation, development partnership, defence and security cooperation and people-to-people relations.

Recalling his visit to Vietnam in 2018, the President said that he himself witnessed the rich cultural heritage of Vietnam and ancient civilizational exchanges between two countries, including our strong Buddhist connections.

The President noted that economic engagement between India and Vietnam has maintained a positive direction, despite the disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He was of the opinion that defence partnership between India and Vietnam has been growing steadily and would contribute to peace, security and prosperity in the region.

Speaking about the cooperation between India and Vietnam at multilateral fora, the Hon'ble President said that our coordinated efforts at the UN and other fora have given voice to the majority of developing countries. He noted that India and Vietnam have been working with ASEAN to contribute to free, open, peaceful, prosperous, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region governed by international law.

(Excerpted from www.pib.gov.in on December 19, 2021)

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News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

India, Vietnam to Collaborate in Field of Digital Media, Sign Letter of Intent

India and Vietnam signed a Letter of Intent here to collaborate in the field of digital media, paving the way for further strengthening the partnership between the two countries. Information and Broadcasting Minister of India Shri Anurag Thakur and his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Manh Hung signed the document that envisages the sharing of information and experience in establishing policies and regulatory frameworks on digital media and social networks.

According to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting the LoI also envisages conducting capacity building and training programmes for media professionals and officials in the two countries. A letter of intent (LOI) is a document that declares the initial commitment of two parties as they enter into a business deal with each other. It

outlines the chief terms of the prospective deal.

The Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting emphasized that the deep relationship between India and Vietnam was further strengthened with the recent visits of the President and the Prime Minister of India to Vietnam, and this meeting would shape the bilateral cooperation in the field of new technologies and challenges, such as the 'infodemic', which all countries are grappling with during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also informed Vietnamese counterpart about the Digital Media Ethics Code being implemented by the government since February 2021.

During the meet, Hung invited Indian Minister to Vietnam and talked about enabling journalists of both countries to access information about the socio-

economic developments in each other's nations for wider dissemination of success stories and stronger people-to-people ties, a ministry official said. The meeting was also attended by Prasar Bharati CEO Shashi Shekhar Vempati; Jaideep Bhatnagar, Principal DG, Press Information Bureau (PIB) and Vikram Sahay, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting among other officials from both sides.

This year completes five years of "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" between India and Vietnam, and the year 2022 will mark fifty years of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the ministry said.

(Excerpted from www.financialexpress.com on December 16, 2021)

© Financial Express

Indian Industry Inks 12 Business MoUs with Vietnam

On the occasion of the visit of Vuong Dinh Hue, President of the National Assembly of Vietnam, who attended the "Vietnam India Business Forum" on December 17, 2021, organized by the Embassy of Vietnam and the Confederation of Indian Industry, as many as twelve MoUs were exchanged between Vietnamese and Indian enterprises in the fields of public health, provision of pharmaceutical materials, drug and vaccine production, oil and gas, information technology and technology transfer, education, and tourism.

India and Vietnam have shared a long-standing traditional relationship that has been cultivated by leaders from both countries. They established diplomatic relations in 1972, which over time evolved into a Strategic Partnership in 2007 and further into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2016. Trade and investment cooperation has been one of the main pillars of

bilateral relations between these two nations. In terms of investment, India has over 315 active projects in Vietnam with a total investment capital of nearly \$ 1 billion ranking 26th out of 141 countries and territories investing in Vietnam. The capital mainly focuses on the processing and manufacturing industries (accounting for 54.5 per cent). In terms of trade, the two-way turnover in the first ten months of 2021 reached nearly \$ 11 billion, up by nearly 40 per cent y-o-y and surpassed the total trade turnover of 2020. India is currently amongst the top 10 biggest trading partners of Vietnam while Vietnam is India's fourth-largest trading partner in ASEAN.

Trade and investment cooperation between Vietnam and India has achieved positive results in recent years, but it is still modest and not commensurate with the potential and advantages of both sides. The economies of the two countries have

many similarities, which can support and complement each other for mutual development.

Specifically, India can become a supplier of input materials, for Vietnam in industries such as textiles and garments, shoes and leather, and machine manufacturing; at the same time, creating more favourable conditions for Vietnamese products, such as consumer goods, electronics, agricultural and aquatic products, wood products, rubber, to penetrate deeply into the Indian market. Besides, Vietnam also offers a wide scope for cooperation and mutual support in the fields of textiles and garments, high-tech agriculture, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, information technology, energy, infrastructure, and mining.

(Excerpted from www.economicstimes.com on December 17, 2021)

© Economic Times

News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

India Sets up Centre of Excellence in Software Development & Training (CESDT) at ICT Innovation Centre, NIPTICT

As part of India's commitment to promote Information Technology skills in CLMV countries, an Agreement was signed in 2015 between the National Institute of Posts, Telecom and ICT (NIPTICT), Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, Kingdom of Cambodia and Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC), a research and development institute of the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, Government of India to establish a Centre of Excellence in Software Development & Training (CESDT) and accreditation of these training

courses in Cambodia under ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund (AICF). The total cost of the project is approximately INR 43.00 crore. The idea of setting up CESDT as a "finishing school" is to develop the employable work force and bridge the gap between academia and industry. Due to the ongoing pandemic, formal inauguration of the Centre could not take place and the two CDAC experts, who were to visit Cambodia to look after centre coordination and course delivery could not travel. Given the uncertainty on the start of the international flights

and to roll out the activities by saving time, both sides decided to start the courses from India in an online mode. Once international travel normalises, two dedicated trainers will manage the first 1 year of training activities along with the Cambodian trainers, trained at CDAC in India, for a period of six months and assist in centre co-ordination.

(Excerpted from www.khmertimeskh.com on August 16, 2021)

© Khemer Times

DPM Looks Beyond COVID-19 While Opening CLMVT+Forum 2021

While opening the CLMVT+ Forum 2021, the Deputy Prime Minister has reiterated the need for cooperation among member countries post COVID-19 to make the region a center for trade and investment. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Commerce Jurin Laksanawisit, presided over the opening of the "CLMVT+ Forum 2021: Accelerating a Resilient Recovery", which is being attended by the ambassadors of Cambodia and Lao PDR. Speaking at the ceremony, the DPM remarked that due to the scourge of COVID-19, economic aid for those affected remains an urgent matter for the governments of all nations, but noted that administrations must also look to economic recovery once the pandemic

subsides. He stated Thailand's intention at this year's forum is to enhance ties with Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam, as well as their trading partners, so that economic measures may lead rehabilitation post COVID-19, adding the Kingdom is committed to promoting trading ties among CLMVT so that it may become a center for commerce and investment. The minister explained that handling COVID-19 takes a flexible approach that is committed to sustainability. He pointed to restarting border trade as one way to reinvigorate commerce and said his administration supports mechanisms such as properly performing border transport. The minister noted that trade matters must

be considered with social aspects also in mind, pointing to environmentalism and the grass roots economy as important. He explained Thailand's approach will be to enhance SMEs and Micro enterprises while also promoting innovative technologies such as the Blockchain to open new avenues. The DPM voiced his belief that the CLMVT Forum, which encompasses five countries with a total over 244 million people, will boost investor confidence and draw attention to the region.

(Excerpted from www.thainews.prd.go.th on August 24, 2021, authored by Praphorn Praphornkul)

© National News Bureau of Thailand

Action Plan for CLMV 2021-2022 Approves Bolstering Economic Growth

The 12th ASEAN Economic Ministerial Meeting has adopted an action plan for CLMV 2021-2022. CLMV consists of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. The action plan for CLMV 2021-2022 focuses on five key areas, such as the collaboration on trade and investments, the implementation of the commitment in the region for the

development of a CLMV framework, human resource and the restoration plan in the COVID-19. The meeting also discussed the development of the comprehensive recovery plan and the implementation of the Hanoi City's action plan on strengthening of the cooperation in ASEAN Economy and the link of supply chain response to

the spread of the COVID-19 in order to reduce the impact of the economy in the region as well as strengthening the supply chain connectivity to ensure that the supply chain is strong and resilient in the future.

(Excerpted from www.khmertimeskh.com on August 29, 2021)

© Khemer Times

Addressing Climate Change in the Mekong-Ganges Region

Following the 11th Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) meeting on July 21, the foreign ministers of the MGC's six member countries (Cambodia, India, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam) agreed on the need to increase cooperation on sustainable water resource management. The ministers pledged to enhance technical cooperation in water resource management, share experiences, enhance human resource development, and improve the capacity of integrated water resource management systems. The need to prioritize climate change-related issues in the Mekong-Ganges basin was first addressed in the 10th MGC ministerial meeting, in which the foreign ministers decided to focus on climate change as a new area of cooperation, particularly stressing water resource management as the starting point.

According to the MGC plan of action adopted in 2019 for 2019-2022, steps regarding climate change were to be followed by undertaking collaborative projects in the areas of climate change adaptation, flood and drought management, disaster mitigation, and water resource management. India for its part offered to organize trainings and workshops for MGC countries' professionals at the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj. This marked a fundamental change for the MGC, whose initial purpose, when it was formed in November 2000, was to focus on four traditional areas of cooperation: tourism, culture, education, and transport and communications.

According to a study mentioned in the Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2017, the Asia-Pacific region, which includes the MGC countries, is at a higher risk of climate change-related casualties and economic losses for the period of 2020 to 2030. The report estimates that 40 per cent of global economic losses due to

disasters will be incurred by countries in the Asia-Pacific.

Furthermore, the report highlights the fact that since 1970, approximately 2 million people in the Asia-Pacific have died as a direct result of natural disasters, representing 59 per cent of the global death toll. Though the principal causes have been earthquakes and storms, water-related incidents are increasingly becoming a prevalent cause of fatalities. In 2018, floods disrupted life in countries such as Afghanistan, China, North Korea, India, Japan, Laos, and many others in the region. In fact, almost half of the 281 natural disasters in 2018 happened in the Asia-Pacific, including 10 of the deadliest incidents. Given the wide ambit of risk associated with natural disasters, an increasing number of people in Asia and the Pacific now fall under the category of "affected": people who require immediate assistance during a period of emergency i.e., basic survival needs such as food, water, shelter, sanitation, and immediate medical assistance.

Climate change has especially been a concern for the Lower Mekong River basin countries: Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. An increase in temperatures along with changes in the intensity of rainfall and river flows, and a pattern of floods alternating with droughts are all impacting the lives of communities residing on the basin, destroying their homes, crops, and fisheries, and creating food shortages along with a decrease in livelihoods.

According to research conducted by the Mekong River Commission (MRC), the next 20 to 50 years will see a wide number of changes marked by an increase in temperatures across the Lower Mekong basin. By 2060, it is estimated that the average annual temperature rise in the basin region would reach well over 3.3 degrees Celsius, with the change in rainfall under a dry climate scenario to fall by 16

per cent and under a wet climate scenario to increase by 17 percent. Unpredictable weather patterns lead to a whole range of issues. One example is crop failure, which decreases the domestic supply of food grains, thereby increasing food prices and straining government resources. Moreover, the risk of disease also increases thanks to climate change, which can disrupt decades of development gains in a short amount of time.

As for the public response in India, the Climate Change Asia report 2013 revealed that over 50 per cent of Indian respondents were informed about climate change and its adverse effects. The Mintel Sustainability Barometer 2021 also concluded that overall 48 percent of Indian respondents were concerned about climate change, with 78 percent of those having listed deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and chemical spillage as among the top environmental concerns.

In fact, citizens of the MGC countries feel that government should do more in taking concrete steps to address the challenge of climate change, as highlighted in the aforementioned surveys. The focus of the MGC Ministerial Meeting on sustainable water resource management and climate change has therefore become a crucial and urgent area for cooperation on these issues. MGC countries can take this opportunity to increase awareness of climate change with their citizens and at the same time build trust by taking relevant steps that address the climate issues in the Mekong and Ganges region.

(Excerpted from www.diplomat.com on December 17, 2021, authored by Lohita Solanki)

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Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiative: Strengthening India-Southeast Asia Ties

At the turn of the century, India joined hands with five Southeast Asian nations to launch the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiative with an aim to enhance bilateral and regional economic and strategic relationships. The initiative is in line with a series of attempts that India has made ever since it started a new chapter in its foreign policy paradigm with the 'Look East Policy' almost three decades ago. Now, India wants to take a big step forward.

External Affairs Minister Shri S Jaishankar said that India wants a multi-dimensional engagement with the Mekong region considering its great importance. In an address at the 11th Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) meeting, he said that the MGC must broaden the base of their partnership by identifying newer areas of cooperation. "We aim to promote connectivity in the region in the broadest sense of the term including not just physical, but also digital, economic, and

people-to-people connectivity," he said.

Shri Jaishankar also said that the MGC stands on a strong foundation of shared geographical, historical and civilizational ties amongst the six countries. "This oldest sub-regional cooperation is as much a celebration of our long and rich history of trade, cultural and people-to-people exchanges as it is a vehicle to advance modern day cooperation to bring progress and prosperity to our people," he said.

After the Bangkok meeting, the MGC had decided to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the group but the plan didn't materialise because of the coronavirus pandemic that has wreaked havoc across the world. Calling for a "collective and collaborative" response to effectively deal with the coronavirus pandemic, Shri Jaishankar said there was a need to find ways on how the MGC partnership can lend its strength to the fight against the pandemic. "We

are into the second year of dealing with the pandemic-related disruption. Our experience shows that the virus does not respect national boundaries. It is, therefore, necessary that the response to the pandemic is also collective and collaborative," he said.

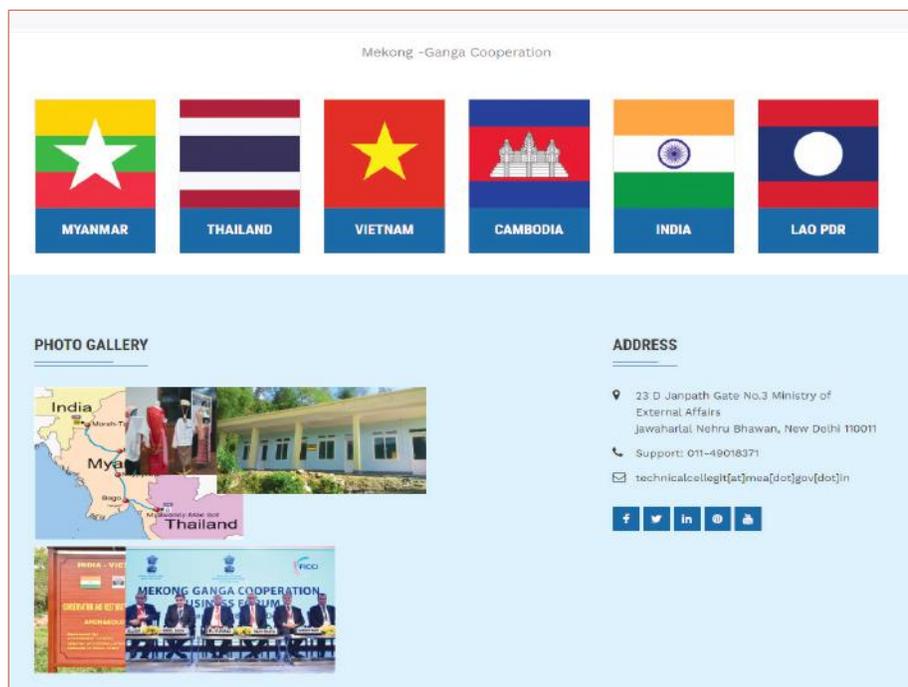
The Mekong subregion is important for India also because of continental and maritime reasons, according to K Yhome, a senior researcher. Myanmar and Vietnam have long coastlines in the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea, respectively, and India should explore a trilateral security cooperation that focuses on defence areas such as capacity building, joint exercises and training, he wrote in a recent article for the Observer Research Foundation.

(Excerpted from www.indibiz.gov.in on July 23, 2021)

© Indibiz.gov.in

Further Reading

- Understanding Quality Energy-Related Infrastructure Development in the Mekong Subregion: Key Drivers and Policy Implications, ERIA Discussion Paper, Series No. 363, March 2021
- Mekong-Ganga in Indo-Pacific: Boosting Sub-Regional Ties? RSIS Commentary, No. 177, December 2021
- Feasibility Study on the Transmission Highway in ACMECS, ERIA Research Project Report 2020, No. 17, December 2021



Homepage of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation
(www.mgc.gov.in)

Resources

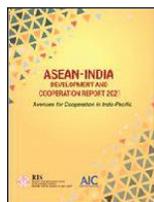
Twenty Years of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC): Achievements and Way Forward

Launched in Vientiane, Lao PDR in 2000, the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) completed twenty years in 2020. The MGC initiative is a sub-regional cooperation organisation comprising India and five ASEAN countries, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. To commemorate the 20 years of establishment of MGC, the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) in collaboration with the ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS organised an international conference entitled “Twenty Years of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)” on 5-6 November 2020 at New Delhi in virtual mode. Edited by Dr Prabir De, this volume is an outcome of the aforesaid conference, and examines the connected past, present, and future of MGC. This commemorative volume presents a selected set of papers, which were presented at the aforesaid conference. Although the economic engagements between India and Mekong have been limited, there is further scope to scale up our economic relations. This book shows the path to strengthen the MGC partnership in the third decade of its establishment.



ASEAN-India Development and Cooperation (AIDCR) 2021: Avenues for Cooperation in Indo-Pacific

The ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) come out with the 2nd edition of ASEAN-India Development and Cooperation (AIDCR) 2021: Avenues for Cooperation in Indo-Pacific. AIDCR 2021 presents the scope, challenges, and opportunities in deepening the ASEAN-India partnership. The objective of the Report is to promote ASEAN-India integration with a particular focus on current challenges unleashed by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the regional cooperative mechanisms that could provide solutions to them. This Report is an independent assessment of various economic and social relations between ASEAN and India.



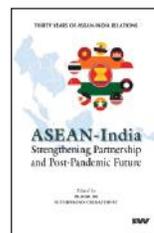
Advancing Partnership in Indo-Pacific

The ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS edited the proceedings of the 11th edition of Delhi Dialogue entitled “Advancing Partnership in Indo-Pacific” presents a detailed account of discussions of the Delhi Dialogue XI which was held on 13-14 December 2019 in New Delhi. It also presents summary, key recommendation, speeches and the set of papers presented at the conference. The proceeding covers some important areas of cooperation between ASEAN and India in respect to evolving concept Indo-Pacific, namely, Emerging Architecture of Indo-Pacific; Regional Connectivity in Indo-Pacific; Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Indo-Pacific; Future of Multilateral Trading System. This volume is an important resource for the current phase of ASEAN-India partnership and the new engagements in Indo-Pacific.



Thirty Years of ASEAN-India Relations: ASEAN-India Strengthening Partnership and Post-Pandemic Future

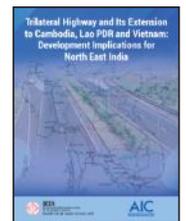
The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India are bound together by their shared history and culture. Relation with ASEAN is one of the cornerstones of India's Foreign Policy. Starting in 1992, when India joined ASEAN as a sectoral dialogue partner, ASEAN and India are going to complete thirty years of their bilateral relations in 2022. The ongoing pandemic has imposed many global and regional challenges. Moving from cooperation to integration, there is a need to jointly address challenges to strengthening the partnership between ASEAN and India in various areas. Edited by Dr Prabir De and Dr Suthiphand Chirathivat, this book addresses some of these challenges in a lucid manner. It presents a set of 15 research papers, which were presented at the sixth ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks (AINTT) roundtable in 2020. Divided in five major sections, this volume reviews some of the achievements of ASEAN-India relations while completing



three decades of partnership, and presents a set of new agenda for the fourth decade. It also underlines the desire of the ASEAN countries and India to diversify and further strengthen the relations in the third decade. This volume is also published to commemorate the thirty years of ASEAN-India relations.

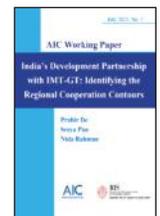
Trilateral Highway and Its Extension to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam: Development Implications for North East India

This Report assesses the status of the economic linkages of the NER, identifies the constraints behind and at the India-Myanmar border, and recommends policy measures to augment the linkages between the NER and Southeast Asia. This study also reviews the institutional arrangements and identifies key elements that may hinder the movement of goods and people across the India-Myanmar border along the TH. It also analyses the development impacts of the TH on India's NER.



India's Development Partnership with IMT-GT: Identifying the Regional Cooperation Contours, AIC Working Paper No. 7, August 2021 by Prabir De, Sreya Pan and Nida Rahman

The Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) initiative is aimed towards invigorating economic development in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. IMT-GT provides a sub-regional framework to promote economic cooperation and integration. India is IMT-GT's civilizational partner. India's development partnership with Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand under the framework of IMT-GT could see rejuvenation from the partnership relished within the ASEAN framework. This article discusses the aspects of the IMT-GT, their line of activities and projects and programmes. It also looks into the opportunities arising from India's cooperation with the IMT-GT.



Important Reading

The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and Its Possible Eastward Extension to Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam: Challenges and Opportunities

Edited by Fukunari Kimura, So Umezaki, Anita Prakash

June 2020, Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA)

The Trilateral Highway (TLH) exemplifies the letter and spirit of connectivity between India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It connects India, Myanmar, and Thailand, and is linked with ASEAN's connectivity plans. Still a project under construction, its potential contribution to the economic growth and development of the region is indubitable. This study examines the maximising of these objectives through a proposed extension of TLH to Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Viet Nam. The study on the TLH and its eastward extension fulfils this current need, and also lays down pathways for medium- and longer-term integrated connectivity solutions between India and ASEAN.

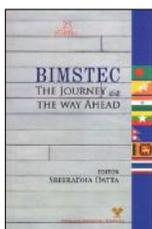


BIMSTEC: The Journey and the Way Ahead

By Sreeradha Datta

ISBN: 9789390095384, 2021, Pentagon Press

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a sub-regional organisation straddling five member states from South Asia and two from Southeast Asia. In the larger context of the global developments in the Bay of Bengal and the Indo-Pacific, BIMSTEC has taken on a more distinct salience and collaborative endeavours would prove beneficial for



all the member-states. While the lack of perceived progress within BIMSTEC has introduced fatigue and doubts as well as scepticism about its goal and ability to deliver, cooperation within BIMSTEC assumes paramount importance given the present state of international cross-border permeability. The pandemic has buttressed the need for BIMSTEC members to be on a common platform to address similar issues of security threats, traditional and non-traditional, within a complex politico socio-economic environment. The chapters highlight the sectors that need focus, the aspects that require greater attention and the issues that can provide common grounds to take the journey forward.

New Futures for BIMSTEC: Connectivity, Commerce and Security

By Adhuri Subramanyam Raju and Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury

ISBN: 9781000480429, Taylor & Francis, 2021

BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) represents one of the most diverse regions of the world. Providing a unique link between South Asia and Southeast Asia, it brings together 1.5 billion people and a combined GDP of \$2.7 trillion. This volume focuses on issues related to connectivity, commerce, and security challenges facing BIMSTEC. It studies BIMSTEC's relevance as an inter-governmental organization in the changing international milieu. The volume discusses the necessity of connectivity to enhance Bay solidarity and analyses the political, strategic and security concerns that restrain commercial connectivity. It also looks at the Bay of Bengal region as a zone of competition—and possible collaboration—between the littoral countries and major powers involved in the region. Comprehensive and topical, this volume will be an essential read for



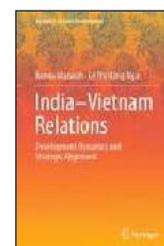
scholars and researchers of international relations, South Asian studies, foreign policy, diplomacy, Southeast Asian studies, defence and strategic affairs, maritime studies, international trade, regional cooperation, and political studies.

India-Vietnam Relations: Development Dynamics and Strategic Alignment

By Reena Marwah, Lê Thị Hằng Nga

ISBN: 9789811678219, 2022, Springer Singapore

This book provides an in-depth analysis of the close cultural links between India and Vietnam. It discusses the issues of trade negotiations under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Indo-Pacific construct. Issues such as strengthening the economic partnership, contemporary development challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including weakening supply chains, and geo-strategic tensions are explored in this book. It enriches understanding of the potential of the two countries to develop as manufacturing hubs for the region and beyond. Given the more aggressive posturing by China in 2020, the concluding chapter includes the policy prescriptions with a futuristic vision, for India and Vietnam to catalyze their strategic and bilateral partnership. Well researched and analytical, the book draws extensively from several interviews of experts, diplomats, journalists, businesspersons, and members of the diaspora. It is a must read for students, researchers, think tanks, area study centers, and all institutions engaged in Asian studies, encompassing narratives extending from the developmental to political, from the bilateral to the multilateral and from the geo-economic to the geo-strategic.



Important Reading

Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy

Edited by: Aparna Pande

ISBN: 9780429619960, 2021, Routledge



This handbook offers a comprehensive overview of South Asian foreign policy, examining the complex history and present state of South Asian foreign policy, the foreign policy of the countries of the region,

as well as their relationships with their neighbors and key external players, such as China and the United States, in an effort to understand South Asia's place in the world order. It illustrates the future trajectory of foreign policy in the region and analyses future of regional arrangements like SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and BIMSTEC.

Social Transformations in India, Myanmar, and Thailand: Volume I: Social, Political and Ecological Perspective

Edited by Chosein Yamahata, Donald M. Seekins, Makiko Takeda

ISBN: 978-981-15-9615-5, 2021,

Palgrave Macmillan

This book focuses on the different challenges and opportunities for social transformation in India, Myanmar and Thailand, by centering communities and individuals as the main drivers of change. In doing so, it includes discussions on a wide array of issues including women's empowerment and political participation, ethno-religious tensions, plurilingualism, education reform, community-based healthcare, climate change, disaster management, ecological systems, and vulnerability reduction.



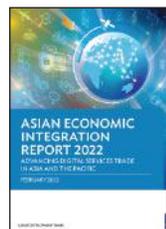
Asian Economic Integration Report 2022

Asian Development Bank

ISBN: 978-92-9269-361-9 (print),

978-92-9269-362-6 (electronic),

978-92-9269-363-3 (ebook), 2022



Another year into the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the report describes an Asia and Pacific region that has more experience in tackling pandemic hardships, better data showing

positive integration trends, and greater confidence in regional cooperation to address shared concerns. The publication gives an overview of changes in trade and global value chains, cross-border investment, financial integration, and the movement of people since the pandemic began.

ASEAN and India-ASEAN Relations: Navigating Shifting Geopolitics

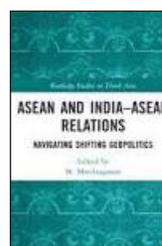
Edited by: M. Mayilvaganan

ISBN: 9781000460964, 1000460967,

2022

Routledge

This book analyses the nearly 30 years of India-ASEAN relations from a contemporary perspective, identifies the reasons for India's vibrant and significant relation with ASEAN and examines the cultural, economic, political and strategic linkages between India and ASEAN. The book projects the future of India-ASEAN relations in the face of the changing Indo-Pacific geopolitics and explores potential policies which could enhance the connection between India and Southeast Asian countries. Arguing that ASEAN is of primary importance to India, the book suggests that any successful outing in the Indo-Pacific would need a strong partnership with India.



Assam as India's Gateway to ASEAN

Asian Development Bank

ISBN: 9789292627256, 9292627252,

2021

This publication builds on a vision for Assam, the largest state in northeast India, to follow an outward-looking growth strategy and become a \$75 billion economy by 2025. It outlines the potential and key features of Assam as a geostrategic location for multimodal connectivity, regional and cross-border trade, and economic corridors between India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well as Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. The vision for Assam as India's gateway to ASEAN is also geared toward ensuring that both the state and the country remain committed toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.



COVID-19 and the Future of Tourism in Asia and the Pacific

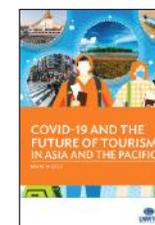
Asian Development Bank and UNWTO

ISBN: 978-92-9269-429-6 (print), 978-

92-9269-430-2 (electronic), 978-92-

9269-431-9 (ebook), 2022

Tourism in Asia and the Pacific has been transformed over the last 2 decades by the impacts of globalization, digitalization, rising disposable incomes, and shifting consumer preferences. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has accelerated some trends, such as digitalization, and is likely to have permanently altered what consumers are looking for. New opportunities are emerging, such as putting tourism on a more sustainable trajectory, enhancing digitalization, and boosting community engagement and inclusion. The report suggests how governments can foster sustainable recovery in the sector considering tourism's environmental, social, and economic impacts.



Statistical Indicators

Socio and Macro Indicators of MGC Countries, 2020

| Indicator | India | Cambodia | Lao PDR | Myanmar | Thailand | Vietnam |
|--|---------|----------|---------|---------|----------|---------|
| Population, total (million) | 1380.00 | 16.72 | 7.28 | 54.41 | 69.80 | 97.34 |
| GDP (current billion US\$) | 2660.25 | 25.81 | 19.13 | 79.85 | 501.64 | 271.16 |
| GDP per capita (current US\$) | 1927.71 | 1543.67 | 2629.71 | 1467.60 | 7186.87 | 2785.72 |
| GDP, PPP (current billion US\$) | 8972.13 | 73.90 | 59.92 | 278.68 | 1272.17 | 841.68 |
| Agriculture, forestry, and fishing, value added (% of GDP) | 18.32 | 22.38 | 16.21 | 21.98 | 8.63 | 14.85 |
| Industry (including construction), value added (% of GDP) | 23.52 | 34.80 | 32.16 | 36.25 | 33.10 | 33.72 |
| Services, value added (% of GDP) | 48.89 | 36.60 | 40.73 | 41.77 | 58.27 | 41.63 |
| Trade (% of GDP) | 37.87 | 123.81 | .. | 54.47 | 97.99 | 208.25 |
| GDP Growth Rate (%), (2000-2020) (CAGR) | 9.07 | 10.27 | 12.76 | -7.38 | 7.14 | 11.42 |
| Gross capital formation (% of GDP) | 29.28 | 24.94 | | 29.66 | 23.88 | 27.01 |
| Gross domestic savings (% of GDP) | 28.92 | 24.92 | | 31.78 | 29.40 | 25.43 |
| Inflation, consumer prices (annual %) | 6.62 | 2.94 | 5.10 | 8.83* | -0.85 | 3.22 |

Source: World Development Indicators (WDI), The World Bank, Washington, D.C.

Note: * Values are from 2019

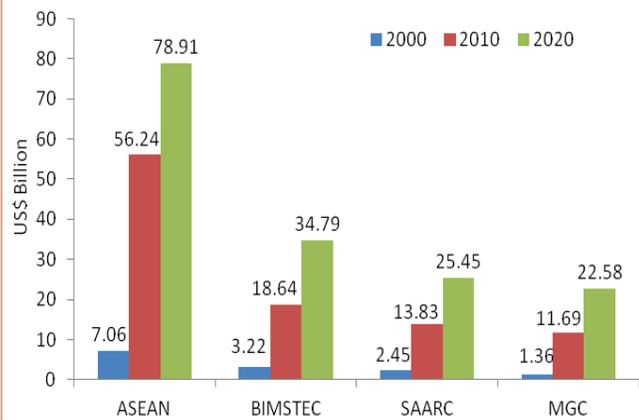
Intra-regional Trade

| Year | ASEAN | | MGC | | BIMSTEC | | SAARC | |
|---------------------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|
| | Value (US\$ Billion) | Share (%) |
| 2010 | 323.69 | 24.84 | 31.20 | 4.96 | 24.83 | 4.37 | 16.32 | 3.68 |
| 2020 | 345.65 | 20.95 | 62.88 | 7.12 | 39.24 | 6.05 | 24.27 | 5.01 |
| CAGR (2010-2020), % | 0.66 | | 7.26 | | 4.68 | | 4.05 | |

Source: Calculated based on DOTS, IMF

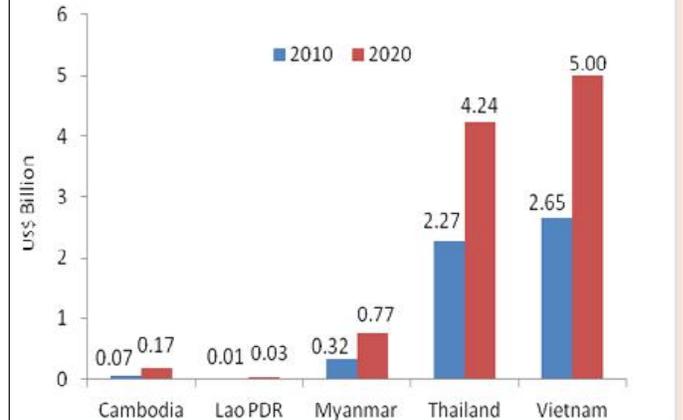
Statistical Indicators

India's Total Trade with Regional Block



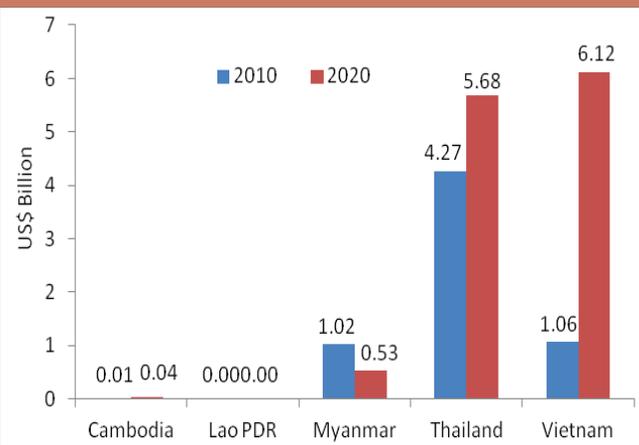
Source: Export Import Data Bank, Government of India

India's Export to MGC countries by Partners



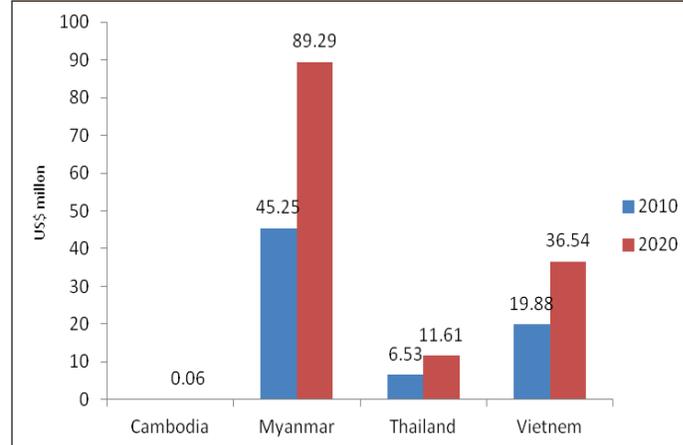
Source: Export Import Data Bank, Government of India

India's Import from MGC countries by Partners



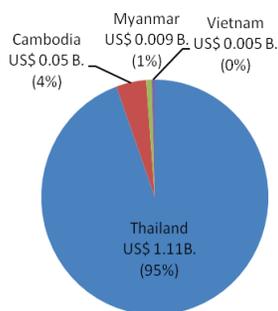
Source: Export Import Data Bank, Government of India

India's Overseas Investment in MGC Countries



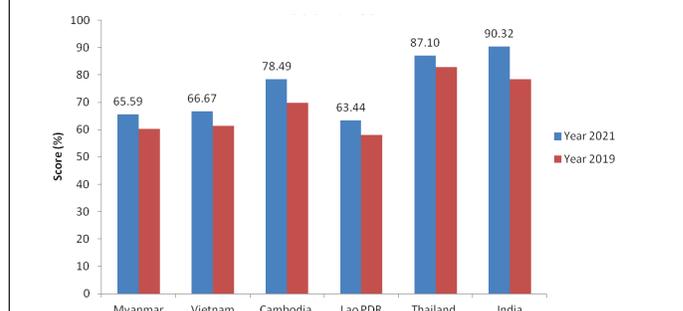
Source: Reserve Bank of India

India's Inward FDI Equity Inflow from MGC Countries (2000 to September 2021)



Source: Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, India

Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade in MGC Countries



Source: UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation

Photographs Depicting MGC Cooperation



Digital Village

Photo courtesy: <https://www.digital-village.in/>



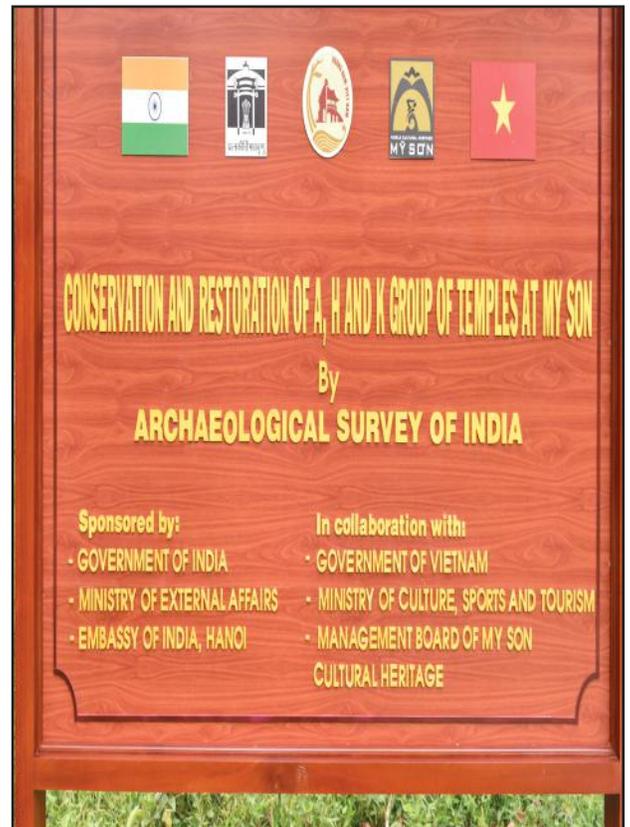
Asian Traditional Textile Museum

Photo courtesy: Mekong Ganga Cooperation, mgc.gov.in



Inauguration of the Project of Construction of two-room single-storey kitchen and dining room, Bo Ly Kindergarten, Bo Ly Commune, Tam Dao District, Vinh Phuc Province, Vietnam. The project was completed under India's Quick Impact Project for CLMV sub-region.

Image Courtesy: <https://mgc.gov.in/portfolio/view/16>



Conservation and Restoration Activities undertaken by ASI, India in Vietnam

Image Courtesy: <https://mgc.gov.in/portfolio/view/16>

Mekong-Ganga Policy Brief

An RIS Publication on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)

The *Mekong-Ganga Policy Brief* seeks to disseminate the policy-related research, news, viewpoints, and information about resources among the policy circles and think-tanks to promote the cause of deeper cooperation between India and Mekong countries. Views expressed by the authors in this policy brief are their personal, and do not represent the views of AIC or RIS. The information contained has been compiled from various sources, as cited, purely for education and dissemination, and not for commercial purposes. The copyrights of the material included remain with the original sources. *Mekong-Ganga Policy Brief* is available from AIC or RIS or can be downloaded from www.ris.org.in

About RIS

Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) is a New Delhi-based autonomous policy research institute that specialises in issues related to international economic development, trade, investment and technology. RIS is envisioned as a forum for fostering effective policy dialogue and capacity-building among developing countries on global and regional economic issues. The focus of the work programme of RIS is to promote South-South Cooperation and collaborate with developing countries in multilateral negotiations in various forums. RIS is engaged across inter-governmental processes of several regional economic cooperation initiatives. Through its intensive network of think tanks, RIS seeks to strengthen policy coherence on international economic issues and the development partnership canvas. For more information about RIS and its work programme, please visit its website: www.ris.org.in

About AIC

Considering the work of the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group (AIEPG), and its Report with recommendations for forging a closer partnership for peace, progress and shared prosperity, the Heads of the State/Government of ASEAN and India at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit 2012, held at New Delhi on 19-20 December 2012, recommended the establishment of ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) using existing resources at New Delhi. AIC was set-up at RIS. AIC serves as a resource centre for ASEAN Member States and India to fill the knowledge gaps that currently limit the opportunities for cooperation. AIC undertakes policy research, advocacy and networking activities with organizations and think-tanks in India and ASEAN, with an aim to promote the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership. For more information please visit <http://aic.ris.org.in>

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