

### Special Articles

## Sustainable agriculture in the Mekong-Ganga region: A collaborative pathway for India and Vietnam

Dr Dang Thai Binh\*

### Introduction

The Mekong-Ganga region is an important agricultural region spanning several Southeast and South Asian countries, where agriculture plays a crucial role in the economies of millions of people. India and Vietnam, two key countries in this region, have established a close cooperation framework in the agricultural sector, driven by shared interests in food security, economic stability, and sustainable development. However, the two countries' agricultural sectors face many challenges, such as climate change, increasingly depleted resources for agricultural development (land, water), increasingly shrinking agricultural land areas, etc. This requires focusing on sustainable agricultural development, where cooperation between India and Vietnam can play a vital role in the region.

### *Current agricultural landscape in the Mekong-Ganga region*

Agriculture remains the mainstay of the economies of the Mekong-Ganga countries, contributing significantly to GDP and providing livelihoods for most of the population. However, this sector is facing significant pressures that threaten its sustainability. First, the region is highly vulnerable to climate change, including erratic rainfall patterns,

rising temperatures, and increasing extreme weather events. These changes directly affect crop yields and water access, increasing the risk of food insecurity. Climate change could reduce rice production in some parts of the region, severely affecting the food security of millions of people who depend on this staple food (Mainuddin et al., 2011; Kumar et al., 2018).

The consequences of intensive farming, especially in rice production, have resulted in severe soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, and depletion of water resources. The excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has further exacerbated environmental degradation, resulting in long-term damage to the region's agricultural potential (Boretti, & Rosa, 2019).

Characterized by small-scale agricultural production, traditional agricultural production, and the experience of farming households, agricultural production in Vietnam and India is facing increasing economic pressure due to fluctuating market prices, increasing input costs, and limited access to technology and markets (Ho et al., 2022). These challenges hinder the ability to invest in and adopt sustainable agricultural practices, leaving the region's agricultural sector vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks.

\* Director of Vietnam Center for the Advanced Study of India Institute for South Asian, West Asian and African Studies (ISAWAAS)

### India-Vietnam agricultural cooperation: A foundation for sustainability

India is a comprehensive strategic partner of Vietnam, and this relationship is increasingly nurtured by economics, national security and defense, and people-to-people diplomacy. In agriculture, the two countries have established a solid foundation for agricultural cooperation through exchanging knowledge, technology, and resources. Both India and Vietnam are major rice producers and exporters in the world. Collaborative efforts have focused on developing and disseminating high-yielding, climate-tolerant rice varieties, which are critical to ensuring food security in the face of climate change. For example, Indian agricultural research institutes such as Indian Institute of Rice Research (IIRR) introduced drought-tolerant rice varieties in Vietnam, supported the Vietnamese government in establishing Agricultural Genetics Institute (AGI) (Quynh Chi, 2023). Nghiên cứu trên has significantly improved resilience to climate variability. Vietnam's experience in aquaculture, especially in sustainable shrimp and fish farming, has been shared with India, contributing to the sector's development. India's advances in aquaculture technology, including breeding techniques and disease management, have benefited Vietnam, leading to increased productivity and sustainability. In addition, the transfer of agricultural technologies, including precision farming, organic farming, and post-harvest management practices, is an essential aspect of cooperation between the two countries (Vu Trong Hung, Quach Thi Hue, 2020). These technologies help improve productivity while minimizing environmental impacts, ensuring that agricultural practices contribute to long-term sustainability in the sector.

### Opportunities for enhanced cooperation

Based on the solid foundation of cooperation that the two countries have built, there are several areas where India and Vietnam can enhance cooperation to promote sustainable agriculture in the Mekong-Ganga region. The two countries can focus on developing and disseminating climate-tolerant crop varieties to mitigate the impact of climate change on agriculture. Collaborative research projects between India and Vietnam can focus on developing drought-, flood-, and salinity-tolerant crop varieties. These crops are crucial to maintaining productivity in areas vulnerable to extreme weather, ensuring food security for millions of people.

Water is a critical resource for agriculture, and both the Mekong and Ganga basins face significant challenges in water management. Collaborative efforts could focus on improving irrigation efficiency, promoting water conservation practices, and developing sustainable aquaculture systems. For example, India's experience in basin management and Vietnam's expertise in efficient water use in rice fields could be shared to benefit both countries.

Knowledge exchange and technology transfer are essential to promote sustainable agricultural practices. India and Vietnam can enhance cooperation in precision farming, organic farming, and digital platforms for farm management and market access. Training programs, workshops, and farmer-to-farmer exchanges can facilitate smallholder farmers' adoption of these practices, helping them contribute to sustainable agriculture.

In addition, enhanced policy dialogue and regional cooperation are essential for sustainable agricultural development in the Mekong and Ganga regions. To support these initiatives, enhancing policy dialogue and institutional cooperation between India and Vietnam is essential. Establishing joint task forces, sharing best practices in agricultural policies, and promoting public-private partnerships can create an enabling environment for sustainable agriculture. Both countries can collaborate to influence regional policies and frameworks, promoting sustainability in the agricultural sector across the Mekong-Ganga region.

### Challenges to address

Although there is significant potential for sustainable agricultural development cooperation between India and Vietnam, there are still several challenges that need to be addressed by the two countries to realize this potential. First, the two countries need to align their national policies. Differences in national policies and priorities can hinder cooperation. For practical cooperation, it is essential to synchronize policies related to agriculture, trade, and environmental protection, ensuring that joint initiatives are supported and endorsed by both countries. Both countries share the common theme of poor infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, which can limit the effectiveness of collaborative efforts. Investment in transport and logistics infrastructure is needed to support adopting sustainable practices and ensure agricultural products can reach markets

efficiently. Smallholder farmers, most vulnerable to climate change and economic pressures, must actively participate in sustainable development initiatives in the region's agricultural sector. Farmers are the backbone of agricultural production in both India and Vietnam; ensuring their access to resources, knowledge, and markets is essential for the success of sustainable agriculture efforts.

## References

- Mainuddin, M., Kirby, M., & Hoanh, C. T. (2011). Adaptation to climate change for food security in the lower Mekong Basin. *Food Security*, 3, 433-450.
- Vu Trong Hung, Quach Thi Hue. (2020). Agricultural Cooperation between India and Vietnam-Possibilities and Challenges. [https://www.cescube.com/vp-agricultural-](https://www.cescube.com/vp-agricultural-cooperation-between-india-and-vietnam-possibilities-and-challenges)

- [cooperation-between-india-and-vietnam-possibilities-and-challenges](https://www.cescube.com/vp-agricultural-cooperation-between-india-and-vietnam-possibilities-and-challenges)
- Kumar, P., Tokas, J., Kumar, N., Lal, M., & Singal, H. R. (2018). Climate change consequences and its impact on agriculture and food security. *International Journal of chemical studies*, 6(6), 124-133.
- Boretti, A., & Rosa, L. (2019). Reassessing the projections of the world water development report. *NPJ Clean Water*, 2(1), 15.
- Ho, T. D., Kuwornu, J. K., & Tsusaka, T. W. (2022). Factors influencing smallholder rice farmers' vulnerability to climate change and variability in the Mekong Delta Region of Vietnam. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 1-31.
- Quynh Chi. (2023). Định hướng phát triển 1 triệu ha lúa chất lượng cao ở Ấn Độ. <https://nongnghiep.vn/bai-7-dinh-huong-phat-trien-1-trieu-ha-lua-chat-luong-cao-o-an-do-d370171.html> ■

# Transition of Agri-Food Systems in MGC Countries: Food Security, Adequate Nutrition and Livelihoods

Dr. P. K. Anand,\* Dr. Srinivasa Rao@ and Dr. Rohit Saini@

## Context and Relevance

**M**ekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) initiative, launched with the signing of the Vientiane Declaration in November 2000 in Lao PDR, is an important framework for strengthening cooperation between India and five ASEAN countries: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. The focus of this initiative started with cooperation in four areas namely tourism, culture, education and transport and communication,<sup>1</sup> and expanded to include six additional areas of cooperation-agriculture and allied sectors, health and traditional medicine, MSMEs, science and technology, skill development and capacity building and water resources management during the 9th MGC Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM)<sup>2</sup> in Singapore in 2018. The Ministers also reaffirmed commitment to cooperation during the 12th MGC FMM in 2023, with an aim to promote socio-economic development and narrow the development gap among MGC countries.<sup>3</sup> Deepening cooperation can promote better regional integration among MGC countries.

In this framework, enhancing India's cooperation as a part of the Act East Policy has focused on an extended neighbourhood in the Indo-Pacific region including ASEAN and would help India's

better socio-economic integration in the region. In particular, cooperation to transform agri-food systems in MGC countries is vital due to its potential to provide livelihoods and incomes. Enhanced access to food as well as agricultural inputs can lead to improved welfare for rural households thereby achieving better food and nutritional outcomes. Against this background, this write-up explores the socio-economic structure of the MGC countries and proposes to address critical challenges faced by MGC countries and especially its CLMV (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam) members.

## Regional Distribution of Incomes and Size of Population in MGC Countries

The MGC countries constitute 20.9 per cent share of the global population and their share in global GDP improved to 4.5 per cent in 2023, from 3.3 per cent in 2011 which validates the growth of the region. Its relative share in global agriculture including forestry, and fishing was substantially higher ranging between 14.2 to 14.8 per cent in 2011 and 2023 respectively.<sup>4</sup> Among MGC countries, India is a bigger partner with a significant share in both world GDP as well as across MGC countries. Both Thailand and Viet Nam also have a considerable share in regional GDP.

\* Visiting Fellow, RIS. @ Fellow, RIS.

**Table 1: MGC Countries - Select Parameters on Food Security and Nutrition**

Sl. No.	Country	Undernourishment (%) (3-year average)		Children under 5 years of age who are stunted (%)		Children under 5 years affected by wasting (%)	Per capita food supply variability (kcal/cap/day)*	
		2010-2012	2020-2022	2011	2022	2022	2011	2021
1.	India	15.4	16.6	42.8	31.7	18.7	24.0	11.0
2.	Cambodia	8.9	4.8	35.6	22.3	9.6	36.0	40.0
3.	Lao PDR	13.2	4.7	41.9	27.7	9.0	31.0	28.0
4.	Myanmar	7.4	3.8	31.9	24.1	7.4	68.0	23.0
5.	Thailand	8.7	5.2	14.6	11.8	7.7	43.0	18.0
6.	Viet Nam	8.6	5.0	26.4	19.3	6.6	23.0	17.0
	<b>World</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>27.1</b>	<b>22.3</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>

Note: “\*”Indicates the standard deviation of the per capita food supply over the previous five years.

Source: FAOSTAT

## Ensuring Food Security and Nutrition to attain SDGs in MGC Countries

The 12th MGC Foreign Ministers’ Meeting (FMM) in 2023 agreed to enhance cooperation in the field of agriculture and allied activities, encouraging private enterprises to invest in the agricultural sector, including primary production, product processing and value chain creation. This intervention would help to improve livelihoods and income opportunities for vulnerable groups like small farm holders, women, youth and indigenous communities. Such cooperation mechanisms can further help to improve farm production and promotion of value chains in the agri-food systems leading to better access to food grains, tackling the food price volatility and thus helping to improve both food and nutritional outcomes among MGC countries (Table 1).

## Sustainable Livelihoods and Incomes

The importance of agriculture sector in the MGC countries is clearly visible in terms of higher relative share of agriculture GDP and the level of dependence (Table 2). The size of the rural population as well as the percentage of employment in agriculture sector in the total population among MGC countries is

significantly high. It gives a platform for enhanced cooperation among MGC countries which is essential to provide sustainable livelihoods and incomes to farm households leading to improved overall welfare among MGC countries.

The agricultural production in MGC Countries contributed significantly to the global production of cereals and pulses (16.4%), sugar crops (25.5%), primary & citrus fruits (14.4%), roots and tubers (15.2%), vegetables (14.7%) and oilseeds (8.0%) in 2022, despite having only 4.9 per cent share in global agricultural land (Table 3). There is a scope of making investments in development projects toward bringing more land under agriculture.

Furthermore, improving agriculture value added per worker in MGC countries, in particular, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar, is crucial for reducing the development gap among MGC countries. Effective cooperation and sharing of knowledge, technologies and best practices are essential in this regard. It is also critical to digitalise the agri-food systems, ensuring the better adoption of technologies by all stakeholders, in particular, by improving the capabilities for sustainable production

and productivity of the agri-food systems. Some of these interventions and cooperation can help to facilitate the transition of the sector, leading to better food and nutritional outcomes including reduction of food price volatility.

## Status of Trade in MGC Countries

Under ASEAN-India FTA, all the MGC countries are India's FTA partners. India's trade with ASEAN countries increased from US\$ 495.6 billion in 2010 to US\$ 858.5 billion in 2022, reflecting a CAGR of 4.7 per cent. However, India's trade with MGC countries experienced a negative growth rate of (-) 2.3 per cent during 2010 to 2022. In contrast, India's trade with BIMSTEC countries increased by 2.5 per cent for the same period of time.<sup>5</sup> India and MGC countries have substantial untapped trade and value chain potential, which remain unrealised due to barriers to trade and structural differences in the economies. A conference organised by RIS highlighted that the removal of non-tariff measures (NTMs), reduction of trade costs, strengthening connectivity, promoting skills development, organising regional trade fairs, etc. would significantly facilitate an increase in trade.<sup>6</sup> The share of India, Thailand and Vietnam in global trade in agricultural products was 2.35, 2.26 and 1.64 per cent respectively in 2022, while the combined share of Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar was 0.41 per cent, which needs to be enhanced (Annexure).

## Promoting Agri-Food Systems Transformation in MGC Countries

Transforming agrifood systems in the MGC region is significant to enhance efficiency, resilience, inclusiveness and sustainability of the sector, particularly in the context of climate change and increasing extreme weather events. This necessitates MGC countries' need to enhance cooperation to increase investments, adoption of emerging technologies and promotion of innovations, R&D in agri-food systems. Promotion of such transitions and cooperation among MGC countries is required to support sustainable agricultural production and productivity of land, labour and other resources for transforming rural livelihoods, and promoting healthy-diets. This transition would also help to attain the 2030 Agenda and its several SDGs, including no poverty (SDG 1), zero hunger (SDG 2), good health and well-being (SDG 3), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), responsible production and consumption (SDG 12), partnerships for the goals (SDG 17). Forward looking decisions and deeper cooperation would also help in the judicious use of depletable resources, which is critical in the wake of climate change.

### Key Areas for Cooperation in Agri-Food Systems

- The exchange and promotion of transfer of emerging technologies, along with the utilisation

**Table 2: Contributions of Agri-Food Systems in MGC Countries**

Sl. No.	Country	Agriculture, forestry, and fishing, value added (% of GDP)		Employment in agriculture (% of total employment)		Agriculture value added per worker (USD at constant 2015)		Rural population (as a % of total population)	
		2011	2023	2011	2022	2011	2020	2011	2023
1.	India	17.2	16.0	49.1	42.9	1510.1	2228.7	68.7	63.6
2.	Cambodia	34.6	21.5	56.5	36.6	1172.4	1461.6	79.3	74.4
3.	Lao PDR	20.8	16.1	70.2	69.6	1257.1	1654.0	69.3	61.8
4.	Myanmar	32.5	20.4	52.9	45.5	1252.2	1461.8	70.9	67.9
5.	Thailand	11.6	8.6	41.0	30.4	2216.9	3001.8	55.3	46.4
6.	Viet Nam	16.3	12.0	48.3	33.6	1197.5	2129.3	68.9	60.5
	World	<b>4.0</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>31.8</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>48.0</b>	<b>42.7</b>

Source: (i). WDI, World Bank; (ii). FAOSTAT.

of innovations and better adoption of ICT-related solutions by all stakeholders, and efficient mechanisation of farming systems are essential to improve the productivity of land and labour to address the development gap of MGC countries.

- In this context, sharing good practices, knowledge, and enhancing capacity-building activities, in particular, increasing the capabilities of vulnerable groups of small farm holders, women, youth and Indigenous communities is crucial to the transition of agri-food systems with more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient farming practices under changing climate.
- Mobilising resources and facilitating finance and investments can support the transformation of agri-food systems, leading to increased adaptation and mitigation practices in the MGC countries.
- Promotion of cooperation in the areas of value chain development for identified crops and food commodities is critical to increase the agri-busi-

ness activities leading to improve the overall trade in the MGC countries.

- Harmonising standards and addressing regulatory challenges, including NTMs is key to overcome trade barrier and to enhance trade in MGC countries.

### Conclusions and Way Forward

The effective cooperation and collaborations among MGC countries is critical to address the challenges faced. It includes enhance cooperation to meet the food security needs, adequate nutrition and for sustainable livelihoods and incomes of the MGC countries. The following steps are critically needed in this regard:

- Establish partnerships to exchange knowledge and best practices to support bio-economy and circular economy-related initiatives.
- Collaborate with International organisation such as FAO, IFAD, UNCTAD and multilateral and regional development banks like World Bank

**Table 3: Agricultural Production in the MGC Countries, 2022  
(in Million tonnes)**

Sl. No.	Country	Share of agri-land to land area (%)	Cereals and Pulses	Oil crops & Oil Equivalent	Sugar Crops	Fruits, Primary and Citrus	Roots and Tubers	Vegetables
1.	Cambodia	34.6	12.9 (0.4)	0.1 (0.1)	0.8 (0.04)	0.6 (0.1)	17.8 (2.0)	0.6 (0.1)
2.	Lao PDR	9.8	4.1 (0.1)	0.0 (0.01)	1.5 (0.1)	1.3 (0.1)	9.6 (1.1)	1.5 (0.1)
3.	Myanmar	19.9	30.8 (1.0)	1.2 (0.5)	12.0 (0.5)	2.7 (0.2)	0.8 (0.1)	4.9 (0.4)
4.	Thailand	46.0	39.9 (1.3)	4.3 (1.7)	92.1 (4.2)	12.2 (1.1)	34.6 (3.8)	2.7 (0.2)
5.	Viet Nam	39.3	47.4 (1.5)	0.4 (0.2)	11.1 (0.5)	15.1 (1.4)	11.9 (1.3)	17.8 (1.5)
6.	India	60.1	382.8 (12.1)	14.3 (5.6)	439.4 (20.1)	126.3 (11.5)	63.6 (7.0)	145.1 (12.4)
	MGC Countries	48.5	517.8 (16.4)	20.3 (8.0)	556.8 (25.5)	158.2 (14.4)	138.2 (15.2)	172.7 (14.7)
	<i>World</i>	<b>36.9</b>	<b>3155.6</b>	<b>254.1</b>	<b>2183.9</b>	<b>1099.3</b>	<b>906.8</b>	<b>1173.1</b>

Note: Figures in the parentheses are percentage share in world total

Source: FAOSTAT

and ADB to meet funding and investment requirements.

- Leverage certain G20 initiatives including the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP), and outcomes of the G20 Meeting of Agricultural Chief Scientists (MACS), Group on Earth Observations Global Agricultural Monitoring (GEOGLAM), International Research Initiative for Wheat Improvement (IRI-WI) and MAHARISHI Initiative i.e., Millets And Other Ancient Grains International Research Initiative, etc. to address the several challenges faced by the MGC countries.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Vientiane Declaration on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation in 2000 on 10th November. [https://mgc.gov.in/public/uploads/Vientiane\\_Declaration.pdf](https://mgc.gov.in/public/uploads/Vientiane_Declaration.pdf)
- <sup>2</sup> 12th MGC. (2023). 'Mekong - Ganga Cooperation (MGC) - Lead Country Mechanism.' [https://mgc.gov.in/public/uploads/Lead\\_Country\\_Mechanism\\_12th\\_MGC\\_FMM.pdf](https://mgc.gov.in/public/uploads/Lead_Country_Mechanism_12th_MGC_FMM.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> MGC, FMM.(2023). 'Joint Ministerial Statement of the 12th Mekong - Ganga Cooperation (MGC), Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM)', 16th July 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- <sup>4</sup> Based on World Development Indicators, World Bank.
- <sup>5</sup> RIS. (2024). "Mekong-Ganga Policy Brief. January 2024, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi.
- <sup>6</sup> RIS. (2017). "Outcome Document of Policy Dialogue on Mekong - Ganga Cooperation (MGC) "Stronger Connectivity, Enhancing Ties". 8th April 2017, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi.

## References

- Vientiane Declaration on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation in 2000 on 10th November. [https://mgc.gov.in/public/uploads/Vientiane\\_Declaration.pdf](https://mgc.gov.in/public/uploads/Vientiane_Declaration.pdf)
- 12th MGC. (2023). 'Mekong - Ganga Cooperation (MGC) - Lead Country Mechanism.' [https://mgc.gov.in/public/uploads/Lead\\_Country\\_Mechanism\\_12th\\_MGC\\_FMM.pdf](https://mgc.gov.in/public/uploads/Lead_Country_Mechanism_12th_MGC_FMM.pdf)
- MGC, FMM.(2023). 'Joint Ministerial Statement of the 12th Mekong - Ganga Cooperation (MGC), Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM)', 16th July 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- Based on World Development Indicators, World Bank.
- RIS. (2024). "Mekong-Ganga Policy Brief. January 2024, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi.
- RIS. (2017). "Outcome Document of Policy Dialogue on Mekong - Ganga Cooperation (MGC) "Stronger Connectivity, Enhancing Ties". 8th April 2017, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi.
- WTO Stats, retrieved data on 20th July 2024. <https://stats.wto.org/>
- FAOSTAT, retrieved data on 17th July 204. <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data>
- World Bank, World Development Indicator, retrieved data on 17th July 2024. <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>
- GoI, MEA.(2016). Look East and Act East Policy (Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question No. 3121), Ministry of External Affairs. Government of India, New Delhi. ■

## Appendix 1: Global Trade of MGC Countries in Agricultural Products and Merchandise, 2022 (billion US \$)

Sl. No.	Country	Agricultural products		Total merchandise trade <sup>^</sup>	
		Exports\$	Imports\$	Exports*	Imports*
1.	Cambodia	1.4 (6.4)	2.3 (7.6)	22.5 (0.1)	29.8 (0.1)
2.	India	54.7(12.1)	46.5 (6.5)	453.4(1.8)	720.4(2.8)
3.	Lao PDR	3.0 (36.5)	1.5 (21.1)	8.2 (0.03)	7.2 (0.03)
4.	Myanmar	5.2(30.2)	2.2 (12.7)	17.1 (0.1)	17.4 (0.1)
5.	Thailand	52.5(18.3)	23.8 (7.9)	287.4 (1.2)	301.03(1.2)
6.	Viet Nam	38.1(10.3)	41.3 (11.5)	371.3 (1.5)	359.2 (1.4)
	MGC Countries	154.9 (13.4)	117.6 (8.2)	1,159.9 (4.7)	1,435.1 (5.6)
	<b>World</b>	<b>2,325.5 (9.3)</b>	<b>2,432.3 (9.5)</b>	<b>24,917.5</b>	<b>25,699.9</b>

Note: '\$' denotes that figures in the parentheses are per cent of agricultural products to total merchandise trade in respective country, and '\*' denotes that figures in the parentheses are per cent to world total merchandise trade. ^ Total merchandise trade includes trade in agricultural products.

Source: WTO Stats

### India, Cambodia ink MoU for construction of school buildings

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) signing took place on February 7, between Dr Devyani Khobragade, Indian Ambassador to Cambodia, and Ing Kantha Phavi, Minister of Women's Affairs of Cambodia, marking the commencement of a project for the construction of a three-classroom building at Sngoun Pich Primary School, funded by the Government of India.

The project, aimed at enhancing the quality of education and learning environments for students from grades 1 to 6, is estimated to cost around \$50,000. It is part of India's Quick Impact Project (QIP) under the Mekong Ganga Cooperation Framework.

Under the QIP scheme, India has been implementing ten projects annually in Cambodia since 2015-16, with funding of up to \$50,000 per project.

The initiative underscores India's commitment to fostering development and cooperation in Cambodia. Over the years, India has approved 51 projects covering various sectors, including IT, agriculture, health, sanitation, women's empowerment, child welfare, rural development, social infrastructure, and the environment.

Thirty-eight projects have been completed, while the remaining thirteen are at different stages of execution, contributing significantly to the welfare of local communities.

Addressing the ceremony attended by officials from the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Embassy of India, Ambassador Devyani commended the Ministry for its initiative, emphasising the importance of empowering girls, reiterating India's belief in the philosophy of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", emphasising human-centric development and knowledge sharing as integral parts of India's heritage.

"This is an all-encompassing outlook that encourages us to progress as one universal family and

calls for human-centric development," she said. "India is committed to knowledge sharing, which is a part of its ancient heritage."

In her remarks, Kantha Phavi expressed gratitude to Indian government for its support in building the school, which will benefit students and faculty alike. She appreciated the fruitful cooperation between the Ministry and the Embassy of India, which has previously facilitated six similar projects focusing on school sanitation, IT proficiency, and classroom buildings.

"The shared aspiration and commitment, the existing cordial relations, and fruitful cooperation between India and Cambodia will continue to grow stronger and stronger for years to come," she added.

Indian diplomatic ties with Cambodia were established in 1952. India was the first and only nation to recognise Cambodia immediately after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, with the opening of an embassy in Phnom Penh in 1981.

New Delhi was also one of the signatories to the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements, which was instrumental in ending the civil war in Cambodia.

Over the years, India has also played an important part in the restoration of archaeological sites in Cambodia, including Angkor Wat and Ta Prohm temples.

Cambodia has received considerable developmental support through programmes like the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) and Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) projects, including the Quick Impact Projects that focus on the practical development of the nation.■

© *Khmer Times*

**Source:** <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501438222/india-cambodia-ink-mou-for-construction-of-school-buildings/>

### India, Vietnam deepen defense partnership to confront regional challenges

Facing shared security concerns, India and Vietnam are stepping up their defense ties, including a port visit to Vietnam by two Indian Navy vessels, New Delhi's delivery of a missile corvette to Hanoi, senior-level meetings, and participation in bilateral and multilateral exercises.

The Indo-Pacific is confronting challenges to peace and stability, as well as to sustainable development endeavors, Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Do Hung Viet said at the Raisina Dialogue conference in New Delhi in February 2024. In response, multilateral cooperation



## News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

and constructive dialogue are key to regional prosperity, he said.

The India-Vietnam comprehensive strategic partnership signed in 2016 “encompasses the entire spectrum of cooperation,” including “deepening defense and security cooperation,” Indian Ambassador to Vietnam Sandeep Arya told the Vietnam News Agency in February.

The nations’ shared concerns include freedom of navigation, territorial integrity and adherence to international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and they have found common ground in opposing the People’s Republic of China’s destabilizing assertiveness, according to the Lowy Institute, an Australian think tank.

Recent bilateral engagements showcased defense cooperation, India’s Ministry of Defence (MOD) reported.

In December 2023, for example, Indian Armed Forces personnel deployed to Vietnam for the fourth iteration of exercise VINBAX, which is designed to develop collaborative partnerships, enhance interoperability and share best practices under the U.N. Charter provisions on peacekeeping operations. The exercise included command post and field training drills, as well as the employment of an engineer company and medical team.

India gifted the domestically built missile corvette INS Kirpan to Vietnam in June 2023. The 90-meter ship has engaged in military and humanitarian assistance missions since being commissioned in 1991.

The May 2023 port visit of the Indian Navy destroyer INS Delhi and the multirole frigate INS Satpura to Da Nang in central Vietnam strengthened bilateral ties and enhanced cooperation and

interoperability, the MOD stated. Earlier that month, the two ships participated in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations-India Maritime Exercise with the Vietnam People’s Navy frigate Tran Hung Dao and other vessels.

Such port visits enable “a greater strategic role for India in Southeast Asia” and allow the Indian Navy to monitor the Malacca Strait from the eastern side of the narrow waterway, a vital conduit for global trade, defense analyst Prakash Nanda wrote for The EurAsian Times digital publication in July 2023.

In June 2023, Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Vietnamese Defense Minister Gen. Phan Van Giang met in New Delhi to discuss defense industry cooperation, maritime security and multinational cooperation.

The third India-Vietnam Maritime Security Dialogue in New Delhi in May 2023 focused on maintaining a secure maritime environment conducive to inclusive growth and global well-being. That same month, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh discussed their nations’ partnership on the sidelines of the Group of Seven summit in Japan, a meeting of leading industrial nations.

“India and Vietnam share historical linkages and existing relations are strong, multifaceted and rooted on cultural and economic pillars,” the MOD stated. “In the defence sector, the cooperation is based on mutual strategic interests, a shared vision for regional stability and upholding the rules based international order.”■

© Indo-Pacific Defense Forum

**Source:** <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2024/04/india-vietnam-deepen-defense-partnership-to-confront-regional-challenges/>

## India Remains Valued ASEAN Partner, Says Laos Foreign Ministry Official

India continues to be a valued partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), according to Chatoulong Bouasisavath, Director General of the ASEAN department in Laos’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In an exclusive interview in Vientiane, Bouasisavath said “India is a valued partner of ASEAN...India understands ASEAN and has been helping in the ASEAN region..there is also a proposal

this year on digitalisation put up by India which when adopted will further cement this India-ASEAN relationship”.

The official emphasized ongoing efforts to integrate digital payment systems across ASEAN states, with India playing a crucial role. Following the successful real-time payments linkage between India and Singapore, similar initiatives are being explored with Malaysia and other ASEAN countries.

*Continued on page 13...*

### Remarks by EAM, Dr. S. Jaishankar at the Opening Session of the ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers' Meeting

Let me begin by expressing my appreciation to Singapore, and to Minister Vivian personally, for your role as Country Coordinator. To Minister Enrique Manalo, I look forward to working closely with you and your team as Philippines takes over as the next Country Coordinator.

I congratulate Lao PDR for the chairmanship of ASEAN and extend our fullest support for the successful Chairmanship. I also thank our colleague and Lao PDR for the warm welcome and hospitality.

The priority that India attaches to ASEAN and EAS platforms is evident from Prime Minister Modi visiting Jakarta last year on the very eve of our own G20 Summit. He had announced a 12-point plan that has been largely acted upon.

For India, ASEAN is the cornerstone of its Act East Policy and the Indo-Pacific vision that was thereafter built on it. For us, political, economic and security cooperation with ASEAN is of the utmost priority. So too are people-to-people linkages, that we are constantly seeking to expand. It is encouraging to note

that our partnership acquires ever more dimensions with each passing year. While our achievements are substantial, our ambitions must always remain high.

I welcome Minister Bendito Freitas of Timor-Leste as an Observer in this meeting, as well. Last year, Prime Minister Modi announced that we will open an Embassy in Dili. We are proceeding to do so very shortly and in fact will be undertaking high-level visits there as well.

I extend my deep appreciation to all of you for strengthening ASEAN-India relations through substantive and tangible cooperation identified under the ASEAN-India Plan of Action and its Annex.■

© MEA, India

**Source:** <https://www.mea.gov.in/outgoing-visit-detail.htm?38030/Remarks+by+EAM+Dr+S+Jaishankar+at+the+Opening+Session+of+the+ASEAN-India+Foreign+Ministers+Meeting>

### Quick Impact Project ‘Mine-Free Villages in Koh Kong Province’ completed

The Quick Impact Project for “Mine-Free Villages in Koh Kong Province” has been successfully completed by a collaboration between the Cambodia Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA), the Embassy of India in Phnom Penh, Koh Kong provincial authorities, and the National Centre for Peacekeeping, Mine and ERW Clearance (NPMEC).

The project completion ceremony was held yesterday in the presence of Tep Kallyan, Deputy Secretary General, CMAA, Sreng Hong, Deputy Governor, Koh Kong province, Major General Chhoeun Chomnit, NPMEC and with the participation of more than 250 people from mine-free villages and students. The Embassy of India was represented by Richhpal Singh, the First Secretary.

According to the embassy's press release, the QIP has resulted in making four villages Tam Kan, Prolean, Chamkar Leu, and Thma Sa in Koh Kong province free from landmines benefiting more than

7000 people.

The project has been implemented under the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, under which India has so far provided grant assistance for 54 qualified investment projects (QIPs), in Cambodia in diverse sectors including education, health, sanitation, agriculture, women empowerment, capacity building, environment, tourism among others.

Speaking at the completion ceremony, both CMAA deputy secretary general and Koh Kong provincial deputy governor, expressed their appreciation and thanks to the grant assistance by India for the project. In his remarks, the First Secretary elaborated on demining cooperation between India and Cambodia.

India has been cooperating with relevant Cambodian entities, both civilian and military, in the demining sector, which is a priority area for the Royal Government of Cambodia. With CMAA, another project, to make Botum Sakor, Sre Ambel, Thmar

## News on Mekong-Ganga Activities

Baing districts and Trapeang Rung commune in Koh Kong province mine-free with a total grant assistance of \$426,709 from India is likely to commence soon.

The grant assistance was announced by the Vice President of India, Jagdeep Dhankhar during his visit to Cambodia in November 2022. The project aims to clear an area of around 1,972,091 square metres of landmines and unexploded ordnances benefiting 86,367 people in the area.

Last year, in March 2023, a month-long artificial limb fitment camp in Banteay Meanchey province was held under the India for Humanity Initiative, and

more than 650 Cambodian nationals were fitted with artificial limbs in the camp.

India has been imparting demining training to NPMEC personnel and has also gifted 19 sniffer dogs. A grant assistance of \$1.5 million for providing demining equipment to Royal Cambodian Armed Forces is under implementation. AKP

© *Khmer Times*

**Source:** <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501525663/quick-impact-project-mine-free-villages-in-koh-kong-province-completed/>

## India, Thailand Commence 13th Joint Military Exercise Maitree To Strengthen Defense Cooperation

1/7/2024: The armies of India and Thailand began their 13th edition of joint military exercise Maitree from July 1 at Fort Vachiraprakan under Tak Province in Thailand to further enhance interoperability between both the forces.

From Indian Army, a total of 80 personnel from Ladakh Scouts is participating in the 2-week-long exercise to be conducted under the United Nations mandate.

The joint exercise will be conducted in joint Counter Insurgency and Counter terrorism Operations in Jungle and Urban environment, an Indian Army official said.

Conducted annually, the previous edition of exercise Maitree was held in India.

It must be noted that India and Thailand have been cooperating in various multilateral forums like ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit, BIMSTEC.

In addition, India is also a member of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) initiated by Thailand in 2002 and of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC).■

© *MENAFN- AsiaNet News*

**Source:** <https://menafn.com/1108394310/India-Thailand-Commence-13Th-Joint-Military-Exercise-Maitree-To-Strengthen-Defense-Cooperation>

## India as Guest of Honour Country at the 33rd Viet Nam EXPO 2024 in Hanoi from 3-6 April 2024

4/1/2024: Indian Pavilion as Guest of Honour at Viet Nam Expo 2024 from 3-6 April visited by Viet Nam Minister of Industry and Trade, H.E. Nguyen Hong Dien. Appreciate Indian Trade Promotion Organization (ITPO) coordinating Indian companies: Allanasons (meat), Adani Ports & SEZ, Bank of India, Bharat Electronics, Fair Exports (India), Ion Exchange (waste/ water treatment), Marhaba Frozen Foods

(meat), Marico South East Asia (consumer/ personal care), Spark Minda Corporation (auto parts), Tata Coffee Vietnam and KCP (machinery) at the Expo.■

© *Embassy of India in Hanoi*

**Source:** [https://www.indembassyhanoi.gov.in/event\\_detail/?eventid=649](https://www.indembassyhanoi.gov.in/event_detail/?eventid=649)

### India Tourism showcased in Vietnam

4/11/2024: India Tourism pavilion at a leading annual travel fair 'Vietnam International Travel Mart' (VITM) 2024 in Hanoi is showcasing Incredible India to Vietnamese tourism agencies, businesses and people in cooperation between Embassy of India, Hanoi and the Indian Ministry of Tourism, New Delhi. The Indian pavilion at 13th VITM 2024 was inaugurated on 11 April 2024 by the Chairman of Vietnamese National Tourism Authority, H.E. Mr. Nguyen Trung Khanh together with the Ambassador of India. At the opening of VITM, Indian music and dance was presented by teachers and students of the Indian cultural centre in Hanoi.

Tourism has been witnessing healthy growth between India and Vietnam in the last couple of years. It is estimated that in 2023, more than 40,000 Vietnamese travellers would have visited India, which represents a substantive increase over the previous year. For Vietnamese tourists, Buddhist sites in India, Indian architectural and civilizational heritage, nature, adventure and various dimensions of Indian culture are of growing interest.

The VITM 2024 is being organized by Vietnam Society of Travel Agents with support from Vietnamese Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and Vietnam Tourism Association from 11-14 April 2024 and it is being attended by sixteen countries and territories including India. Apart from cultural performances, India is disseminating select print material, videos and digital information to visitors, businesses, travel agencies and local media in Vietnam. The Indian pavilion witnessed impressive

footfall on the first day of VITM 2024 which represents sound visible interest in India, touristic trend and further opportunities for tourism from Vietnam to India.

To realize large and growing potential of tourism from Vietnam to India, the Embassy and authorities in India have been organizing in the recent past conducted tours of Vietnamese travel operators to various touristic locations in India. The Embassy is also enhancing awareness about tourism opportunities in India through outreach meetings with Vietnamese travel agencies and promotional material in Vietnamese language across Vietnam, electronically and through digital media. Direct flight connection between six cities in India (Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Kochi, Tiruchirappalli) and the two main cities in Vietnam (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City) have also facilitated greater tourism travel between the two countries. Vietnamese tour operators are increasingly offering travel packages for Vietnamese travellers to various locations in India.

In the light of enormous interest and warmth at the level of the people of India and Vietnam, greater two-way tourism and travel between the two countries will enhance people level appreciation, and further strengthen Indian-Vietnam comprehensive strategic partnership.■

© Embassy of India in Hanoi

Source: [https://www.indembassyhanoi.gov.in/news\\_letter\\_detail/?id=235](https://www.indembassyhanoi.gov.in/news_letter_detail/?id=235)

### Official Visit of H.E. Mr. Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand to India (February 25-28, 2024)

2/27/2024: At the invitation of the External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar, H.E. Mr. Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, is paying an official visit to India during 25-28 February 2024. This is Mr. Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara's first official visit to India after assuming office of the Deputy PM and Foreign Minister.

On 27 February, External Affairs Minister co-chaired the 10th Joint Commission Meeting (JCM)

with Thai Deputy PM and Foreign Minister and hosted a lunch in his honour. During the JCM, the two Ministers reviewed progress in wide-ranging areas of bilateral cooperation, including in defence and security, trade and investment, connectivity, science and technology, health, culture and people-to-people exchanges. The two Ministers also exchanged views on regional and multilateral issues of mutual interest. They expressed commitment to further enhance cooperation in sub-regional, regional

## News on Mekong-Ganga Activities

and multilateral platforms especially within the framework of ASEAN, BIMSTEC, MGC, ACMECS and IMT-GT.

The two Ministers expressed their commitment towards strengthening India-Thailand partnership. They also noted a convergence of the Act East Policy of India which is marking its 10th year in 2024, and the Act West Policy of Thailand. External Affairs Minister welcomed Thailand's decision to co-lead the Maritime Ecology Pillar of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). Both Ministers reaffirmed their resolve for working together to advance the initiative.

Thai Deputy PM and Foreign Minister expressed appreciation to India for sending the Holy Relics of Lord Buddha together with his two disciples, Arahata Sariputra and Arahata Maudgalyayana to Thailand for exposition which will give an opportunity to millions of Thai nationals to pay reverence.

During the JCM, following documents were signed/exchanged: (i) Agreed Minutes; and (ii) MoU between National Institute of Ayurveda, Jaipur of

the Ministry of Ayush, India and Department of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine of the Ministry of Public Health, Thailand on the Establishment of an Academic Collaboration in Ayurveda and Thai Traditional Medicine.

During this visit, Thai Deputy PM and Foreign Minister also called on the Vice President, Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar.

India-Thailand partnership has expanded to diverse areas of cooperation and come to acquire multi-dimensional facets. The visit of Thai Deputy PM and Foreign Minister to India is part of the ongoing high-level exchanges and has contributed to further strengthening of the civilizational bonds between the two friends and maritime neighbours. ■

© MEA, India

**Source:** [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/37664/Official\\_Visit\\_of\\_HE\\_Mr\\_Parnpree\\_BahiddhaNukara\\_Deputy\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_and\\_Minister\\_of\\_Foreign\\_Affairs\\_of\\_Thailand\\_to\\_India\\_February\\_2528\\_2024](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/37664/Official_Visit_of_HE_Mr_Parnpree_BahiddhaNukara_Deputy_Prime_Minister_and_Minister_of_Foreign_Affairs_of_Thailand_to_India_February_2528_2024)

## India Remains Valued ASEAN Partner, Says Laos Foreign Ministry Official

*Continued from page 13...*

"If we can achieve an integrated payment system, it will become easier for tourists who come from India or those who go there as they can use an app for payment," Bouasisavath said.

One of the key factors for the ASEAN bloc is the volatile situation in Myanmar.

ASEAN is proceeding with a five-point program and has appointed a special envoy to address the Myanmar crisis. ASEAN also acknowledged the role of India in maintaining stability in the region.

Regarding economic partnerships, ASEAN remains hopeful that India will reconsider its position on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). On the possibility of getting India back to the Regional Economic Trade Agreement RCEP, the DG said, "The doors are not closed for India and we are still hopeful that India will see value in the agreement."

The RCEP is a free trade agreement among the Asia-Pacific countries of Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore,

Thailand, and Vietnam.

This year marks a decade of India's 'Act East' Policy, which places ASEAN at its core. India has reiterated its full support for ASEAN Centrality, ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), and Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship's priorities and deliverables under their theme "ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience."

In September last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled to Indonesia to attend the 20th ASEAN-India Summit and the 18th East Asia Summit (EAS).

It was the first Summit since the elevation of ties between India and the Association of South East Asian Nations bloc of countries to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2022. ■

(Inputs from ANI)

© DD news

**Source:** <https://ddnews.gov.in/en/india-remains-valued-asean-partner-says-laos-foreign-ministry-official/>

**List of outcomes: State visit of H. E. Pham Minh Chinh, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to India 01/09/2024:**

**A. Outcomes of the Visit**

1. Plan of Action for the implementation of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership during the 2024-2028 period between the Republic of India and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.
2. MoU for cooperation in Customs Capacity Building between the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs of India and the General Department of Viet Nam Customs, Viet Nam.
3. MoU between Central Agricultural University, Imphal, Manipur and Viet Nam Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Hanoi, Viet Nam for cooperation in Agricultural Research and Education.
4. MoU between Ministry of Justice of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the Ministry of Law and Justice of the Republic of India on cooperation in the legal field.
5. MoU between Prasar Bharati, New Delhi, India and the Voice of Viet Nam (VoV), Hanoi, Viet Nam for cooperation on Radio and Television.
6. Two Dollar Credit Line Agreements between the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam represented by the Ministry of Finance and Export-Import Bank of India, amounting to USD 300 mn.
7. Letter of Intent between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for the conservation and restoration of F Block in My Son, Quang Nam Province, Viet Nam.
8. MoU between the Traditional Medicine Administration Ministry of Health of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the National Medicinal Plants Board, Ministry of Ayush of Government of the Republic of India on cooperation in the Field of Medicinal Plants.
9. MoU between the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways of the Republic of India on Cooperation and Development of the National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC) at Lothal, Gujarat.

**B. Announcements:**

10. Virtual Inauguration of Army Software Park at Telecommunications University Nha Trang, Viet Nam.
11. Vietnam to join the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI).

© MEA, India

**Source:** <https://www.mea.gov.in/incoming-visit-detail.htm?38068/List+of+outcomes+State+vis-it+of+HE+Pham+Minh+Chinh+Prime+Minister+of+the+Socialist+Republic+of+Vietnam+to+India>

## Cambodian scholar advocates for institutionalisation of MRUC

At the international scientific-practical conference in Moscow, Kin Phea, Director General of the International Relations Institute of Cambodia at the Royal Academy of Cambodia, proposed the institutionalisation of Mekong-Russia Cooperation (MRUC).

His recommendation was made during the conference “Mekong: Regional Challenges and Possible Solutions” held at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow on Wednesday.

Phea underscored Russia’s longstanding historical ties with Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (CLV countries), its robust relations with Thailand, strategic partnership with Myanmar, and its unique “unlimited” relationship with China.

He emphasised that these relationships position Russia to play a significant role in the Mekong subregion’s development.

“This confluence of factors opens doors for Russia to contribute meaningfully to the region’s development. The Mekong region has a lot of room for economic growth, and Russia can be a big help.

Simply put, Russia has the means and the audience to be a considerable factor in the Mekong region,” Phea stated.

Phea outlined three key areas where Russia could play a pivotal role. On “Economic Potential”, he noted that the Mekong region offers vast economic opportunities. Russia’s expertise in dam construction and resource extraction could facilitate infrastructure projects, benefitting both Russian businesses and the Mekong countries’ power and resource management needs.

In addition, he outlined the “Geopolitical Diversification”, noting that integrating Russia into the Mekong’s geopolitical landscape could foster a more balanced, multipolar environment. This diversification would enhance the Mekong countries’ bargaining power and provide access to a broader range of technology and knowledge.

He also emphasised “Scientific Collaboration”, saying Russia’s strong scientific heritage, particularly in agricultural science and climatology, presents

opportunities for significant collaboration.

Knowledge exchange in these fields could improve the Mekong region’s agricultural sector, enhance food security, and bolster resilience against climate change.

Phea concluded that the establishment of MRUC could diversify partnerships and access new areas of expertise, fostering sustainable development, improving resource management, and addressing climate change challenges. He stressed the importance of open communication and mutual interest to build trust and ensure the MRUC’s success within the Mekong cooperative framework.

The conference, organised by the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, the Institute of Oriental Studies, and the Institute of China and Modern Asia of the Russian Academy of Sciences, brought together approximately 50 experts and scholars from Russia, Mekong countries, and representatives from the Chinese and Vietnamese embassies.

The discussions focused on the Mekong River’s role in regional socio-economic development, resource use conflicts, existing cooperation mechanisms, and the sub-region’s geopolitical dynamics.

The Mekong River, known as one of the longest rivers in Asia, is 4,350 kilometres long and originates on the Tibetan Plateau. The river flows across six countries: China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, ultimately emptying into the South China Sea. The region is the second-richest in fish biodiversity and is also essential to the area’s hydropower production, energy supply, transportation, and agriculture.

Geopolitically, the Mekong subregion is located at a strategic crossroads. The Mekong-Lancang River functions as a crucial land link, connecting Southeast Asia with China to the north and India to the west. The strategic location aligns with China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy; therefore, with the rise of China, the Mekong subregion becomes a geopolitical dynamic in the 21st century.

The confluence of economic and strategic interests has led to the establishment of numerous

Mekong cooperation frameworks (MCF). These include the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) in 1992, the Mekong River Commission (MRC) in 1995, the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) initiated by India in 2000, the Mekong-Japan Cooperation launched in 2007, the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) established by the US in 2009, the Mekong-Republic of Korea (Mekong-ROK) partnership formed by South Korea in 2011, and the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation (MLC) initiated by China in 2016.

Given Russia's historical ties with the CLV countries, its close relations with Thailand, its strategic partnership with Myanmar, and its unique "unlimited" relationship with China, Russia is well-

positioned to play a significant role in the Mekong subregion. This confluence of factors opens doors for Russia to contribute meaningfully to the region's development.

The Mekong region has significant potential for economic growth, and Russia can provide substantial support. Simply put, Russia has the means and the audience to be a considerable factor in the Mekong region, According to Phea.■

© *Khmer Times*

**Source:** <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501513591/cambodian-scholar-advocates-for-institutionalisation-of-mruc/>

### Navigating uncertainty: India's strategic dilemma in Myanmar

3/16/2024: Three years after the military coup disrupted Myanmar's elected government, the junta's grip is finally loosening due to intense conflicts with ethnic insurgent groups under the Three Brotherhood Alliance. These battles, particularly the Arakan Army's (AA) control over significant portions of Rakhine and Chin States, threaten India's strategic interests, including the crucial US\$484-million Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP). This project, which is vital for directly linking India's eastern coastline with its Northeastern states through Myanmar, aims to alleviate logistical challenges and enhance regional integration.

A cornerstone of India's Act East Policy, the KMTTP seeks to foster economic and strategic ties with Southeast Asia, offering an alternative to the Siliguri Corridor. It reflects India's dedication to promoting regional cooperation and connectivity. However, the escalating conflict in Myanmar endangers the project's completion and future operation and calls for India to reassess its approach in the region to protect its interests and ensure the success of this pivotal initiative amidst the crisis.

#### The status of the Kaladan project

The Kaladan project aims for swift completion despite missing several deadlines for its completion in 2014 and 2020, due to land compensation disputes, coordination failures, and challenging terrain. As of May 2023, Indian officials reported that nearly 98 percent of the road portion of the Kaladan project

is finished. In June 2023, Myanmar's Commerce Minister, U. Aung Naing Oo, declared that the road linking Paletwa to Zorinpui in Mizoram was advancing rapidly.

AA targeted the Kaladan project in early 2019, when a joint operation by India and Myanmar's military aimed to repel AA forces was conducted.

Ircon International, responsible for the road's construction, initially planned to engage local contractors in Myanmar to enhance relations and minimise risks from insurgent group attacks on the project. Notably, AA targeted the Kaladan project in early 2019, when a joint operation by India and Myanmar's military aimed to repel AA forces was conducted. This led to the abduction of five Indians working at the site by AA. In mid-2020, there was another confrontation between AA and Junta forces near the project site.

To circumvent such risks, last year, Ircon finalised agreements with two Myanmar companies, Myanmar New Power Construction Limited and Su Htoo Sen, to finish different sections of the unfinished highway. However, these contracts specify a 40-month completion period for the road component, acknowledging possible delays due to environmental, political, and security challenges. Given the ongoing violence, military actions, and frequent assaults by armed factions, these factors significantly complicate forecasting a precise completion date for the project in the current volatile situation.



### **Importance of Arakan Army (AA)**

Founded in April 2009 on the Myanmar-China border in Kachin State, the AA received support from the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). The group aims to establish an “Arakan Nation,” committing to national liberation and restoring sovereignty to Arakan’s people.

Analysts have described the AA’s conflict with the military forces from 2015 to 2020 as the country’s most intense conflict in decades. The AA stands out as one of the most powerful armed groups, running a state-like structure and providing healthcare and education in its areas. Before the 2021 coup, the military regime and AA agreed to a ceasefire, using its famous divide-and-rule strategy to manage ethnic groups.

The AA and the military entered another truce in November 2022, facilitated by a Japanese envoy from the Nippon Foundation.

Following the coup in 2021, the AA initially seemed unclear about its role in the nationwide resistance. However, its strategy evolved to include competing for power with the Junta in Rakhine, collaborating with other ethnic forces against the Junta, supporting resistance forces, and establishing ties with the National Unity Government (NUG). The military’s attacks on AA areas in 2022 ended the first ceasefire. The AA and the military entered another truce in November 2022, facilitated by a Japanese envoy from the Nippon Foundation. Despite this, the AA maintained its positions and warned that the ceasefire was temporary and any Junta action could reignite hostilities.

On 13 November 2023, as part of Operation 1027, the AA attacked Border Guard police stations, breaking the state ceasefire. As of February 2024, it now controls significant towns along the Kaladan River, such as Pauktaw, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, Minbya, and Myebon, and has seized positions in Maungdaw and Buthidaung. The group also took over the central police station in Ponnagyun, near the Kaladan River’s mouth, adjacent to Sittwe. Instead of focusing on development efforts along the Kaladan River, the regime now struggles to defend the Rakhine State capital.

The situation in Sittwe resembles a battle zone with forces from both sides nearby, increasing the risk of conflict. Since January this year, the internet shutdowns, constant war, shortage of food, and inflation of prices have led to a mass exodus, with the remaining population bracing for more air raids

and street conflicts. To assert control over Sittwe, the Junta demolished three bridges. Given the war-like situation, the ethnic armed group’s takeover of Sittwe seems imminent.

The internet shutdowns, constant war, shortage of food, and inflation of prices have led to a mass exodus, with the remaining population bracing for more air raids and street conflicts.

An AA spokesperson assured a leading Indian news outlet that they would not harm the Kaladan project. The AA, along with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), focuses on ending military governance in Myanmar, suggesting the Indian government might need to engage with the armed group.

### **Dilemma of the Indian government**

Since 1990, India’s policy toward Myanmar has emphasised engagement with the ruling powers that place a premium on security and political interests over promoting democratic principles in neighbouring nations. This policy has been exemplified by initiatives such as the recent visit of an Indian Army delegation to Myanmar, led by Lieutenant General Harjeet Singh Sahi, aiming to fortify bilateral relations, military cooperation, and joint endeavours for peace and development in border areas.

Amid the escalating situation in regions like Paletwa and Sittwe and given the AA’s recent declarations, India finds itself at a critical juncture, necessitating a re-evaluation and potential recalibration of its approach toward Myanmar. This imperative involves not only issuing advisories for Indian citizens to leave the region but also actively engaging with a broader spectrum of stakeholders.

The political stability of Myanmar is of paramount importance to India, particularly for the northeastern region and its connectivity projects, such as the KMTTP, since the project is not only a regional connectivity endeavour but a pivotal element of India’s strategic ambitions to counter Chinese influence and enhance stability in its northeastern territories.

India may find itself needing to strike a careful balance between respecting Myanmar’s sovereignty and pragmatically engaging with groups like the AA to protect its strategic interests.

The AA’s dominance over critical areas along the Kaladan project route and its assurances to not

## Opinions

disrupt the project highlights the complexities of engaging with non-state actors in conflict zones. India may find itself needing to strike a careful balance between respecting Myanmar's sovereignty and pragmatically engaging with groups like the AA to protect its strategic interests.

Furthermore, the AA's changing political stance, its interactions with the National Unity Government (NUG), and other ethnic armed groups indicate a shifting political landscape in Myanmar. This suggests that India's policy towards Myanmar must be flexible, accounting for the dynamic nature of alliances and power structures within the country.

Moreover, the introduction of a conscription law by the Myanmar Junta, compelling service from young individuals, underscores the regime's desperation in the face of civil unrest that has led to a significant number of people trying to avoid conscription, as seen in the spike in visa applications at the Thai embassy.

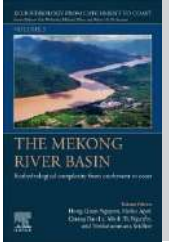
With over 45,000 Myanmar nationals seeking refuge in Indian border states, India's efforts to secure its borders and reassess the Free Movement Regime (FMR) reflect a response to Myanmar's instability, aiming to protect national security. However, the challenge of managing the refugee influx remains, suggesting that providing humanitarian aid could be a vital strategy for supporting the Myanmar populace, which is central to the country's future trajectory towards democratic governance. India's policy towards Myanmar should be adaptable, considering the fluid nature of alliances and power dynamics. ■

© ORF

**Source:** <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/navigating-uncertainty-indias-strategic-dilemma-in-myanmar>

## The Mekong River Basin Ecohydrological Complexity from Catchment to Coast

1st Edition - April 22, 2024, Editors: Hong Quan Nguyen, Heiko Apel, Quang Bao Le, Minh Tu Nguyen, Venkataramana Sridhar, Paperback, ISBN: 9780323908146 eBook ISBN: 9780323914505

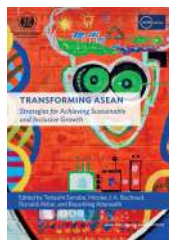


Presents real facts, data and predictions for quantifying human-induced changes throughout the Mekong watershed, including its estuaries and coasts, and proposes solutions to decrease or mitigate the negative effect and enable sustainable development. This is the first work to link socio-ecological interaction study over the whole Mekong River basin through the lens of ecohydrology. Each chapter is written by a leading expert, with coverage on climate change, groundwater, land use, flooding drought, biodiversity and anthropological issues.

Human activities are enormous in the whole watershed and are still increasing throughout the catchment, with severe negative impacts on natural resources are emerging. Among these activities, hydropower dams, especially a series of 11 dams in China, are the most critical as they generate massive changes throughout the system, including in the delta and to the livelihoods of millions of people and they threaten sustainability.

## Transforming ASEAN: Strategies for Achieving Inclusive and Sustainable Growth

Publication | April 2024, Editors: Sonobe, Tetsushi; Buchoud, Nicolas J. A.; Akbar, Riznaldi; Altansukh, Bayarbileg. ISBN 978-4-89974-297-5 (Print) ISBN 978-4-89974-298-2 (PDF)



The book brings together more than 20 contributors from the ASEAN region and beyond to discuss pathways for ASEAN's sustainable transformation. It is divided into three parts, each focusing on crucial aspects of current transitions. Part I examines the dynamics of Southeast Asia's low-carbon economy, exploring strategies to reduce carbon emissions and foster environmentally friendly practices. Part II examines the importance of investing in a new sustainable economy, highlighting the potential for ASEAN regional economic integration, green growth, scientific innovation, and new business models. Finally, Part III explores the ways in which ASEAN can contribute to multilateral cooperation, emphasizing the significance of collaborative efforts on a regional and global scale, such as through the G20.

With policy recommendations and case studies, the book aims to support and offer timely insights and robust policy guidance to governments, policy makers, financial institutions, and stakeholders in the pursuit of climate commitments and the Sustainable Development Goals. It underscores the need for collaboration and investment in knowledge-building and sharing among public and private stakeholders to effectively address the complex challenges of achieving inclusive and sustainable growth in ASEAN.

## Generational Divides in Understanding Thailand's History Grow Amid Political Polarization

Panarat Anamwathana

Date of publication: 2024, Publisher: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, ISBN: 9789815203769

Amid political polarization, knowledge and understanding of Thailand's history have also diverged radically. This divide is especially evident between younger and older generations.

Driving this phenomenon is the growing rejection by students of the traditional history taught in public schools, which in the past had been a means for the Thai state to instil in the young a sense of nationalism, national pride and shared values. Poor pedagogy that emphasizes memorization, and that discourages discussions and critical thinking, has alienated many from the subject. Education professionals and student activists have also been critical of this development.

Moreover, the democratization of information and the availability of alternative sources of historical knowledge have allowed young people to learn about history in ways that challenge the traditional narratives taught in classrooms. The alternative sources include social media, websites by historians and enthusiasts, as well as books printed by independent publishers.

Young people have also begun to engage with history in new ways. They have organized themselves to commemorate aspects of history overlooked in school textbooks and have used history to legitimize their political activism.

This diverging understanding and engagement with history has two main consequences. First, political polarization can deepen, with different sides utilizing their versions of history as legitimization for their political views. Second, it will be harder for the Thai state to instil communal values and a basic understanding of the nation among young people, which can have implications for the building of a shared Thai identity in the future.



## Statistical Indicators

### Socio and Macro Indicators of MGC Countries, 2023

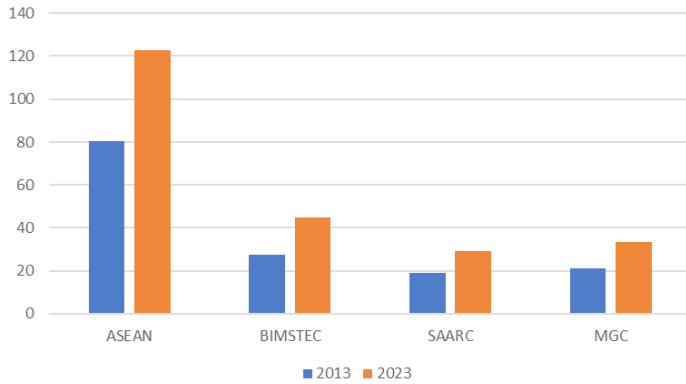
	India	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Myanmar	Thailand	Viet Nam
Population	1428.6277	16.94483	7.633779	54.577997	71.80128	98.85895
GDP (current billion US\$)	3550	32	16	65	515	430
GDP, PPP (current billion US\$)	14537	95	71	322	1682	1502
GDP per capita (current US\$)	2484.8454	1875.071	2075.401	1187.5671	7171.808	4346.768
GDP growth (annual %)	7.58	5.40	3.75	1.00	1.88	5.05
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing, value added (% of GDP)	15.966008	21.48831	16.13906	20.429784	8.571245	11.96049
Industry (including construction), value added (% of GDP)	25.008705	38.45815	30.53358	38.077514	32.88659	37.1201
Services, value added (% of GDP)	49.797535	33.4405	43.99742	41.492703	58.54217	42.537
Trade (% of GDP)	45.853928	113.5384	..	..	129.153	185.72
Gross fixed capital formation (% of GDP)	31.329371	15.2981	..	..	22.96669	31.68*
Gross savings (% of GDP)	30.562944	57.09755	..	..	25.25666	32.56*
Inflation, consumer prices (annual %)	5.6491432	2.127468	31.23013	..	1.228026	3.252893
Annual freshwater withdrawals, total (billion cubic meters)#	647.50	2.18	7.35	33.23	57.31	81.86
Water productivity, total (constant 2015 US\$ GDP per cubic meter of total freshwater withdrawal)	3.91	10.54	2.53	2.08	7.54	3.96
Renewable internal freshwater resources, total (billion cubic meters)	1446.00	120.60	190.40	1002.80	224.51	359.42
Total natural resources rents (% of GDP)*	3.16	0.84	5.38	8.68	1.82	2.55

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

Note: # Date for year 2020, \* data for year 2022, \*\* data for year 2021

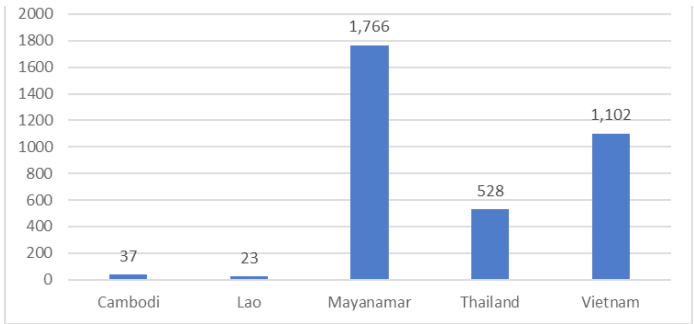
# Statistical Indicators

## India's Trade with Regional Blocks



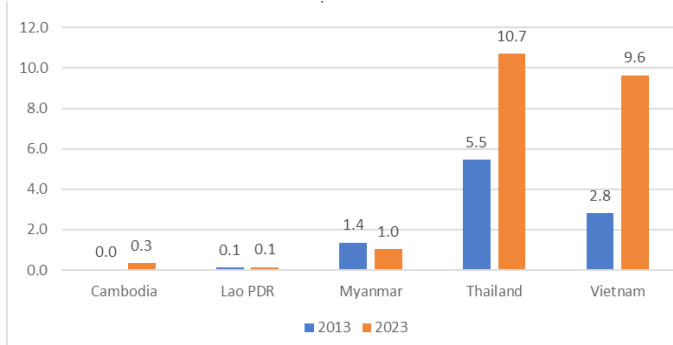
Source: Export Import Data Bank, Government of India

## India's Investment in MGC Countries (April 2000 to January 2024)



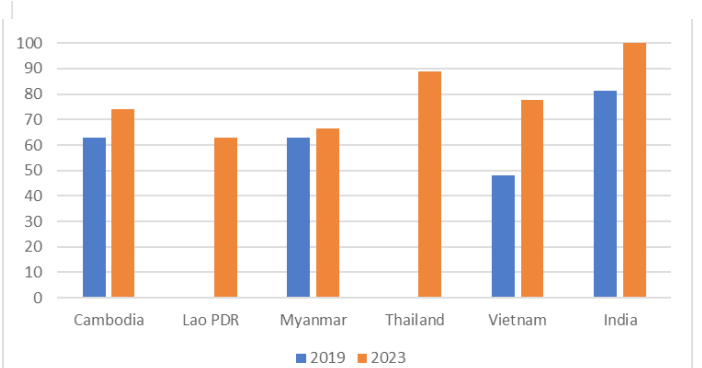
Source: Export Import Data Bank, Government of India

## India's Imports from MGC



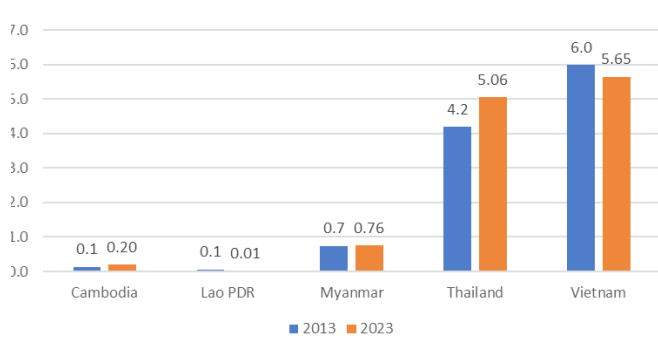
Source: Export Import Data Bank, Government of India

## Paperless Trade in MGC Countries



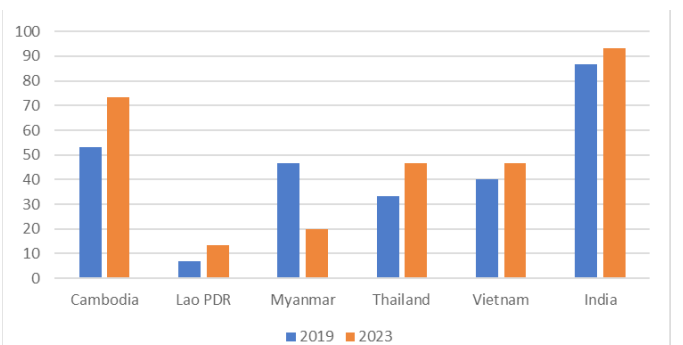
Source: Export Import Data Bank, Government of India

## India's Exports to MGC



Source: Export Import Data Bank, Government of India

## Trade Facilitation for SMEs in MGC Countries



Source: Export Import Data Bank, Government of India

# 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](http://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](http://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>

*Contact us at:*



**RIS**  
Research and Information System  
for Developing Countries  
विकासशील देशों की अनुसंधान एवं सूचना प्रणाली

**AIC**  
ASEAN-India Centre at RIS

Core IV-B, Fourth Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110 003, India  
Ph.: +91-11-24682177-80, Fax: +91-11-24682173-74  
E-mail: [dgoffice@ris.org.in](mailto:dgoffice@ris.org.in); [aic@ris.org.in](mailto:aic@ris.org.in) , Website: [www.ris.org.in](http://www.ris.org.in)

Editorial  
Team

Editor: Dr Pankaj Vashisht, Associate Professor and Coordinator,  
ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS  
Managing Editors: Dr Beena Pandey, Assistant Professor, RIS; Dr. Sampa Kundu, Consultant, AIC;  
Dr Tuhinsubhra Giri, Fellow, AIC