

International Conference on Twenty Years of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) 5-6 November 2020



Left to Right: Amb. Riva Ganguly Das, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), New Delhi; Dr. T C A Raghavan, Director General, Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi and Dr. Mohan Kumar, Chairman, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi

The ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS and Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi jointly organised an international conference to commemorate the Twenty Years of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) on 5-6 November 2020. Dr. T C A Raghavan, Director General, Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi and Dr. Mohan Kumar, Chairman, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi made the Opening Remarks. Inaugural Address was delivered by Amb. Riva Ganguly Das, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), New Delhi. The two-day event had five technical sessions that focused on shared culture and heritage; economic relations; new

economy and sectoral relations; people-to-people contacts and the way forward towards the third decade of MGC. Dr Nivedita Ray, Research Director, ICWA and Dr Prabir De, Coordinator, AIC at RIS delivered the concluding remarks.

Key Recommendations of the Conference:

- Mekong countries and India shall work together on shared historical linkages, and protect the artefacts and preserve the old texts and heritage sites.
- Digital platform will facilitate collaborations and also allow scholars to study ancient texts and scripts, artistic patterns, history of the region among other subjects. MGC countries may consider connecting the individual digital libraries through open sources

which will allow scholars to access text and further collaboration.

- Promotion of Yoga and Ayurveda is another important area that can strengthen the partnership. India can promote the study of yoga, especially in Thailand by getting certificated teachers to Thailand or helping Thai people to come to India to study yoga. India shall help in the standardisation of the practise of Yoga and Ayurveda, leading to strengthen the well being and health security of the region.
- India and Mekong countries can work together for the preservation of rice culture and to organise a rice festival to celebrate the shared cultural links.
- MGC countries may consider establishing Mekong-Ganga Study

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Centre to promote cultural and educational collaboration and also work on further collaboration among the museums of the MGC countries. In order to start these projects, MGC countries can look at the established centres in existing universities and resource centres.

- India needs to extend more scholarship on cultural aspects between India and the Mekong nations.
- MGC can have podcast and virtual seminars and museums where the general public can be invited to participate.
- There is a need for increased attention to joint research focusing on connected histories between North East India and Mekong region, especially on Indian

Kingdoms in ancient Myanmar, Indian system of administration on Vedic model of town planning and Buddhist linkages with Myanmar, ethnic and linguistic affinities.

- A web portal should be set up to provide information on trade trends, custom tariffs and preferences, market opportunities and regulatory compliances, which could be serving as a platform linking MSMEs of the Mekong region and India.
- A regional investment forum can be established that can identify the existing networks and complementarities and facilitate investment into the region.
- India and Mekong countries shall facilitate entry of domestic companies into GVCs via improving the drivers of

investment, especially the functioning of market institutions and by improving the functioning and quality of domestic segment of value chains and the quality of services inputs.

- Mekong countries shall promote the development and establish a regional legal framework to build a new legal document on water protection in the Mekong River.
- An exclusive website for Mekong-Ganga Cooperation would be useful.
- Annual Ministerial meeting of MGC could be elevated to Summit level.
- There is a need for a Secretariat and inter-governmental arrangements to follow up cooperation with high dispersion across sub-regional and sectors.

Webinar on 20 Years of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), 28 May 2020

20 Years of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation MGC

WEBINAR
28 May 2020
2 - 4 PM Indian Standard Time

CHAIR
Amb. Gautam Mukhopadhyay
Senior Visiting Fellow,
Centre for Policy Research (CPR),
New Delhi

PANELLISTS
Mr. Madhuriya Dutta
Director, Trade & Investment Facilitation,
Mekong Institute (MI)
Khon Kaen, Thailand
Dr. Naybandith Rasapol
Director, Lao National Chamber of Commerce & Industry (LNCI), Vientiane,
Lao PDR
Mr. Thuta Aung
Executive Chairman
Mandalay Forum for East Asian Studies,
Yangon, Myanmar

LEAD PRESENTATION
Dr. Prabir De
Professor & Head, ASEAN-India Center (AIC), RIS
New Delhi

WELCOME BY
Dr. Sophana Srichampa
Chair, Centre for Bharat Studies (CBS), Mahidol University, Bangkok
Thailand
Dr. Vo Thi Minh Leis
Deputy Head, Department for GMS Studies, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), Ha Noi
Vietnam
Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta
Executive Director
Asian Confluence,
India

• Launched in Vientiane, Lao PDR in 2000
• An initiative by six countries – Cambodia, Lao PDR, India, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand
• Focus areas: People to people contacts, training and capacity building, entrepreneurship development, Heritage, Trade and investment, Physical and digital connectivity, Tourism

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For participation, register at:
<https://forms.gle/EIDEKlImxrhGHsf7>

The ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS jointly with the Asian Confluence (AC) organised a webinar titled “20 Years of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation” in virtual mode on 28 May 2020. Panellists were from prominent think-tanks, and business chambers of Mekong region. About 60 participants attended, viewed the webinar discussion and took part in the Q&A session. Ambassador Gautam Mukhopadhyay, Senior Visiting Fellow, Centre for Policy Research (CPR), New Delhi delivered the Special Remarks

and Chaired the webinar. Mr Sabyasachi Dutta, Director of Asian Confluence, gave the Welcome Remarks. Dr Prabir De, Professor, RIS and Head, ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) made the lead presentation.

Key Recommendations

- Early completion of the Trilateral Highway and a further extension to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam would strengthen the regional connectivity.
- Increase the bilateral and regional development aid in MGC through

the line of credit (LoC), technical assistance, etc.

- Elevate the MGC ministerial meeting to the Summit level.
- Resume flights, visa and travel in a calibrated manner with MGC and beyond.
- Bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) with Vietnam may generate new trade opportunities, subject to studies and feasibilities.
- Enhanced cultural cooperation – studies, exchange of artists, films,

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- food festivals, cultural heritage, preservation of heritage, joint projects between museums, Nalanda University Online programme for MGC, etc.
- Continue with regulatory convergence, paperless trade and simplification of trade procedures.
 - Initiate B2B Business Facilitation through industry associations and Chambers of Commerce (e.g. FICCI-AIBC, CII, ASSOCHAM, ICC, EEPC India, FIEO, etc)
 - Establish MGC Think-Tank Network of cultural studies, heritage, museums, etc.
 - India can provide capacity building programme for the customs officials, who are handling cargoes in the frontline to improve the trade facilitation process.
 - India and Mekong countries should collaborate to support the local manufacturing unit in post-Covid-19 period to create employment opportunities and income generation in the region. Particularly, the garment industries in Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam have suffered heavily due to pandemic and need some joint initiative to strengthen the industry in the Mekong region.
 - MGC should learn from other Mekong sub-regional cooperation initiatives such as actionable projects, different mechanism and regularity of their programmes, etc., to scale up and streamline the MGC projects, funds and association with Mekong countries.
 - India and the Mekong region should jointly set-up a research and development (R&D) centre for traditional medicine like Ayurveda to improve public health care facilities in the Mekong region.
 - Deeper and more engagement between working groups, sectoral meetings with respective ministry and enhance the engagement with the leader's level.
 - MGC programmes and projects should have more focus on regional aspects and large projects so that they can be streamlined with national programs for sustainability and replicability.
 - Despite fewer cases of Covid-19 reported in Lao PDR, the economy has suffered a huge loss because of lockdown in other countries. India can support providing vaccines, drugs, pharmaceutical equipment, mask, and health sanitizer etc.
 - Lao PDR has a long relationship with India's business community. India should invest in the agro-business industry, ICT related industry, microfinance, etc. to strengthen the investment relationships between the two countries.
 - Need to have cooperation and information sharing between the industry association and business chamber to promote B2B relation with Mekong region.
 - Given the pandemic situation, India's northeast and Myanmar's northwest can be benefited from the e-governance. Indian government should provide innovation and ITeS to scale up the institutions of Myanmar to improve the e-governance.
 - India should scale up the institutions by combine taskforce with IITs and IIMs for initiating incubation centers to strengthen the university network in Myanmar. In addition to the government to government engagement in the education sector, we can encourage non-governmental organizations and private sectors to promote educational sector in the Mekong region.
 - India and Mekong region should jointly organize the workshop, conference etc., to share the cultural and economic achievements and challenges.
 - India and Mekong countries may build up cooperation in health sector to share the experience and mitigating strategy to overcome Covid-19 through video conferencing such as webinar and social media among doctors, health care workers, etc.
 - Despite the completion of 20 years of MGC, common people are not aware of the MGC initiatives and programmes. Therefore, India and Mekong region should jointly publish the achievements and undertake projects in both online and offline to create awareness among the people.
 - India should provide IT scholarship to the Mekong students for helping them to develop the capacity building in the IT sector.
 - For health security, India and Mekong countries should share medical data through an online platform and provide healthcare facilities for the people. India and Mekong countries should cooperate to share the traditional medicinal products, yoga and training programmes.
 - For food security, India and Mekong countries can jointly create a food bank to use it during the crisis.
 - India and Mekong region are known for organic products in the respective countries. To support the farmers growing organic crops in the region, information of organic farmers and their products can be given in online platform to meet global consumers and producers to procure the organic products from the Mekong region.
 - MGC region experiences drought every year, which has a huge impact on agricultural sector in the region. India and the Mekong region can jointly initiate rainwater harvesting in the region to ensure water security and offer reserve water for consumption during the drought situation.
 - MGC countries should endorse cultural cooperation through funding joint research and by engaging students through online mode, and bring out research on cultural linkages between Ganga and Mekong rivers.
 - MGC countries can also support the virtual museum to offer a virtual experience for young students in the digital world.
 - MGC countries should collaborate to share the experience to prevent the Covid-19 and engage in research and development to control the spread.
 - MGC countries can work together to produce a test kit for Covid-19. India has been producing pharmaceutical products and medical equipments for long, and in this regard, India can help MGC for producing test kits to fight against the Covid-19.
 - India can support creating software to trace and track the Covid-19 cases in the Mekong region to treat them effectively.
 - India can help to identify the country among the MGC countries, which need assistance to fight against it and help to prepare for the second wave of the pandemic.
 - To promote the trade relation among MGC, India and Mekong region should cooperate in strengthening institutional linkages and extend the Trilateral Highway to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam for better connectivity. ■

Webinar on Promoting India-Vietnam Cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation (STI): Perspectives and Prospects

24 June 2020

WEBINAR

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

Embassy of Vietnam
New Delhi, India

PROMOTING INDIA-VIETNAM COOPERATION IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION (STI): PERSPECTIVES AND PROSPECTS

Wednesday, 24 June 2020
1400 hrs (Indian time) 1530 hrs (Vietnam time)

WELCOME REMARKS

- Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi**
Director General, RIS

REMARKS

- H.E. Mr Pham Sanh Chau**
Ambassador of Vietnam to India
(Co-Chair)
- Mr Pranay Verma**
Ambassador of India to Vietnam
(Co-Chair)

PANELISTS

- Dr Sanjeev Varshney**
Head & Advisor, International Bilateral Cooperation Division (IBCD), Ministry of Science and Technology, India
- Prof. Le Van Toan**
Chairman of Scientific Council, Center for Indian Studies
- Mr Arvind Gupta**
Founder ISPIRT & Digital India Foundation
- Dr Le Thi Hang Nga**
Deputy Editor-in-Chief, Journal for Indian & Asian Studies, Institute for Indian and Southwest Asian studies
- Dr B. Balakrishnan**
Former Indian Ambassador and Science Diplomacy Fellow, RIS

Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) jointly with the Overseas Office for Science & Technology of Vietnam (VOOST) organized a Webinar on “Promoting India-Vietnam Cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation (STI): Perspectives and Prospects” on 24 June 2020. Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General, RIS made the welcome remarks. H.E. Mr. Pham Sanh Chau, Ambassador of Vietnam to India and Mr. Pranay Verma, Ambassador of India to Vietnam co-chaired the inaugural session and made the Inaugural Remarks. The webinar includes two sessions, namely, opportunities for India-Vietnam STI Cooperation and Covid-19 and Prospects for India and Vietnam Cooperation. Dr. Sanjeev Varshney, Prof. Le Van Toan, Mr. Arvind Gupta, Dr. Le Thi Hang Nga were the distinguished panellist for the session. The closing

remarks were made by Dr. Bhaskar Balakrishnan, former Indian Ambassador and Science Diplomacy Fellow, RIS and Vote of Thanks were extended by Dr. Kapil Dhanraj, Research Associate, RIS.

An increased understanding in sciences would enable India and Vietnam to create trust and foster cooperation in science, technology and innovation. The cooperation between Vietnam and India needs to be bilateral and multilateral. The emphasis must be on advanced communication technologies and capacity building with focus on both natural sciences as well as social sciences. There have been numerous collaborations in social sciences between Vietnam Association of Social Sciences and Indian institutions. The collaboration has been promoted by nine MOUs with various institutions and universities in India. However, few of

them have not been implemented and remained mostly on paper. Therefore, the challenges should be mitigated and collaboration between Vietnam and India should be strengthened in education by opening joint universities, and by improving the quality and effectiveness of existing joint universities. The promotion of Vietnam-India relations also requires active participation from both state- and non- state agencies, including effective coordination between their S&T institutions. A roadmap could be jointly developed by the two countries for STI for achieving the SDGs. The S&T cooperation between India and Vietnam has been very dynamic and include sectors like agriculture, oil and gas, biotechnology, ICT, semi-conductor manufacturing, 5G and defence. There is a great scope and possibilities for further diversification, and cooperation in other areas such as Oceans

Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Activities

Speech by the Hon'ble President of India, at the Banquet Hosted in Honour of President of Myanmar

I am delighted to receive you Mr. President on your first State Visit to India. As neighbours connected by land and water, with a long civilizational friendship, it is only natural that we meet as frequently as possible. After all, from language to food, from dress to rituals, ours are sister civilizations: unique in their own right, but also related. The sacred waters of Irrawaddy and Phalgu have long been part of our religious beliefs, our spirituality and our cultural imagination.

Your meetings here would have reassured you that India remains committed to providing its fullest support for the expansion of your democracy and economic development. India stands for a stable, united and prosperous Myanmar, established through a successful peace process.

And since peace is indivisible, the settlement of ethnic conflict in your country helps us ensure peace

and tranquility on our shared borders. It is in this context, that we are happy to help by sharing our experience with democracy, federalism and constitutionalism with you.

To foster sustainable peace, we must ensure a peace dividend through prosperity. Connectivity between our countries is already expanding, through the building of roads, use of waterways, upgradation of ports and increase of bilateral air services. We need to widen such connectivity to include energy as well.

Another important element of a peace dividend is the provision of capacity. As State Counsellor Daw Suu Kyi has said, she attaches priority to "people understanding that they have the power to change things themselves". It is in this spirit that India is invested in capacity-building in Myanmar.

Myanmar has a proverb and I quote - "the islands depend on

reefs, and reefs depend on islands" unquote. That is to say, our interests are inter-dependent. From such wisdom are mutually beneficial partnerships created. May your pilgrimage to Bodhi Gaya and the divine shade of the Bodhi tree, continue to bless our age-old ties.

(Excerpted from www.presidentofindia.nic.in on February 27, 2020)

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ASEAN-India Ministerial Meeting

On 12 September 2020, External Affairs Minister (EAM) of India H.E. Dr. S. Jaishankar co-chaired the ASEAN-India Ministerial Meeting along with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand H.E. Don Pramudwinai. The Meeting was held virtually and saw the participation of Foreign Ministers of the ten ASEAN Member States and India.

The Meeting reviewed the status of ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership in several areas including maritime cooperation, connectivity, education & capacity building and people-to-people contacts. It reviewed the progress in implementation of the ASEAN-India Plan of Action (2016-2020). The Meeting also reviewed the preparations for the upcoming 17th ASEAN-India Summit and also the progress in the implementation of key decisions of the Leaders of ASEAN Member States (AMS) and India arrived at the 16th ASEAN-India Summit held in Bangkok in November 2019 and the previous Summits. The new ASEAN-India Plan of Action (2021-2025) was adopted at the Meeting. The Ministers discussed ways to strengthen cooperation to fight COVID-19 pandemic and exchanged views on important regional and international developments.

(Excerpted from www.mea.gov.in on 12 September 2020)

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12th Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Senior Officials' Meeting

The 12th Mekong Ganga Cooperation Senior Officials' Meeting (12th MGC SOM) was held via Video Conference on 3 September 2020. The meeting, which was attended by Senior Officials from all 6 MGC Member States, was co-chaired by H.E. Smt. Vijay Thakur Singh, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs and H.E. Mr. Sok Soken, Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Cambodia.

The meeting reviewed the progress made since the 10th MGC Ministerial Meeting held in Bangkok on 1st August 2019 in all areas of cooperation including - tourism and

culture; education; science and technology; traditional medicine and health; agriculture and allied sectors; water resources management; transportation and communication; and small and medium enterprises.

The meeting also discussed the progress made on the MGC Plan of Action (2019-22) which was adopted during the 10th MGC Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok on 1st August 2019 and preparations for the 11th MGC Ministerial Meeting to be held later this year.

(Excerpted from www.mea.gov.in on 3 September 2020)

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Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Activities

17th India-Vietnam Joint Commission Meeting

The 17th Meeting of the India-Vietnam Joint Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation co-chaired by Dr. S. Jaishankar, Hon'ble External Affairs Minister of Republic of India (EAM) and H.E. Mr. Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was held via video-conference on 25 August 2020.

During the meeting, both sides reviewed the recent developments in India-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and discussed the future trajectory of their wide-ranging engagement. They agreed to add new momentum to the economic and defence engagement between the two countries and to explore closer cooperation in emerging areas such as civil nuclear energy, space, marine sciences and new technologies. The co-chairs exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest, especially in the context of the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. EAM underlined Prime Minister's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat for enhancing resilience through self-

reliance and human-centric globalization as the basis for India's economic revival. He invited Vietnam to take advantage of India's new economic capacities and demands.

EAM reaffirmed India's development and capacity building assistance to Vietnam through initiatives such as Quick Impact Projects (QIP), ITEC and e-ITEC initiatives, PhD fellowships, as well as projects in water resource management in Vietnam's Mekong Delta region, SDGs, digital connectivity and heritage conservation. 12 QIPs for implementation in Vietnam have been approved by the Government of India, including 7 QIPs in water resource management in Vietnam's Mekong Delta Region and 5 QIPs related to construction of educational infrastructure in Vietnam.

MoU for "Cooperation between Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service (SSIFS), New Delhi and Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, Hanoi" and MoU between "National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi and Scientific Research Institute of Sea and Islands, Hanoi" were also signed on the margins of the Joint Commission Meeting.

Based on their strong convergence of views on many global and regional issues, both sides agreed to coordinate closely at multilateral forums, including at the UN Security Council, where both India and Vietnam will serve concurrently as non-permanent members in 2021. They also agreed to step up cooperation and coordination at important regional forums under the ASEAN framework. EAM expressed India's full support to Vietnam's chairmanship of ASEAN this year and appreciated the positive leadership provided by Vietnam to ASEAN in a year when the world is faced with the COVID-19 pandemic.

India and Vietnam also agreed to enhance their bilateral cooperation in line with India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the ASEAN's Outlook on Indo-Pacific to achieve shared security, prosperity and growth for all in the region. India invited Vietnam to collaborate on one of the seven pillars of the IPOI.

(Excerpted from www.mea.gov.in on 25 August 2020)

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India-Myanmar Foreign Office Consultations

The 19th round of Foreign Office Consultations between India and Myanmar was held through virtual mode on October 1, 2020. The Indian delegation was led by Foreign Secretary, Shri Harsh Vardhan Shringla and the Myanmar delegation was led by Permanent Secretary, U Soe Han. During the consultations, both sides reviewed the entire gamut of relations, including border cooperation and upgradation of border infrastructure, status of India's ongoing development projects in Myanmar, trade and investment ties, power and energy cooperation, consular matters and cultural cooperation, including the ongoing restoration work on earthquake damaged pagodas in Bagan. Cooperation in regional and multilateral fora was also discussed. Both sides expressed satisfaction that despite the ongoing COVID pandemic,

meetings in several areas, including power, energy etc., have been held through virtual mode, reflecting the depth of the bilateral engagement. It was noted that the next Joint Trade Committee Ministerial Meeting to be held on October 20, will be useful in further strengthening bilateral trade and investment relations.

Both sides also held extensive discussions on the challenges posed by COVID-19 and ways to mitigate its impact, including through vaccine development, supply of medicines, equipment and technology and capacity building. Foreign Secretary reiterated the priority India attaches to its partnership with Myanmar in accordance with India's 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East' policies. He stated that India remained committed to enhancing its multifaceted cooperation with

Myanmar and also to explore new avenues of cooperation.

The Permanent Secretary reaffirmed Myanmar's commitment to further strengthen its time tested partnership with India for the mutual benefit of the two countries. He also expressed appreciation for the COVID related and development assistance extended by India to Myanmar. He thanked India for providing debt service relief under the G-20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative, for the period May 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020. Both sides agreed to hold the next round of Foreign Office Consultations at a mutually convenient date.

(Excerpted from www.mea.gov.in on 1 October 2020)

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Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Activities

Visit of Chief of Army Staff and Foreign Secretary to Myanmar

Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General MM Naravane, PVSM, AVSM, SM, VSM, ADC, and India's Foreign Secretary (FS) Shri Harsh Vardhan Shringla, visited Myanmar on October 4-5, 2020. The visit provided an opportunity to review the sustained progress in bilateral relations which have been marked in recent years by regular high-level visits and interactions.

Both sides agreed to further strengthen their partnership in connectivity projects, capacity building, power and energy, deepen economic and trade ties, further facilitate people to people and cultural exchanges, and broad-base their defense exchanges across all the three services. It was also agreed to deepen cooperation to overcome the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. COAS and FS presented 3000 vials of Remdesivir to the State Counsellor, symbolic of India's commitment to assist Myanmar in its fight against the pandemic. FS indicated India's willingness to prioritize Myanmar in sharing vaccines as and when these become available. Myanmar appreciated India's decision to provide debt service relief under the G-20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative, for the period up to December 31, 2020.

Both sides also discussed progress in the ongoing Indian-assisted infrastructure projects such as the Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project. They exchanged views on an early initiation of work on fresh initiatives such as the upgradation of Yamethin Women's Police Academy, Basic Technical Training School and measures to provide long term sustainability to projects such as

the Myanmar Institute of Information Technology. They agreed to work towards operationalization of Sittwe Port in the Rakhine State in the first quarter of 2021.

Both sides noted the considerable progress made under the Rakhine State Development Programme (RSDP) and proposed finalizing projects under Phase - III of the Programme, including setting up of a skills training center. During the visit, the Project Agreement on the upgrading of agricultural mechanization under the RSDP was also signed. FS conveyed India's support for ensuring safe, sustainable and speedy return of displaced persons to the Rakhine State. The two sides discussed maintenance of security and stability in their border areas and reiterated their mutual commitment not to allow their respective territories to be used for activities inimical to each other. The Indian side expressed their appreciation to Myanmar for handing over of 22 cadres of Indian Insurgent Groups to India.

India announced a grant of USD 2 million for the construction of the border haat bridge at Byanyu/Sarsichauk in Chin State that will provide increased economic connectivity between Mizoram and Myanmar. A quota of 1.5 lakh tonnes of Urad (Vigna mungo) for import from Myanmar till 31 March 2021 was also announced. The Centre of Excellence in Software Development and Training in Myitkyina, was virtually inaugurated. FS also inaugurated the Embassy Liaison Office in Nay Pyi Taw along with U Soe Han, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar.

The Myanmar side expressed appreciation for Indian assistance in the preservation of cultural heritage,

including the repair and conservation of Bagan pagodas that had been damaged in the 2016 earthquake. The two sides discussed plans to install a bust of Lokmanya Tilak in Mandalay to commemorate his 100th death anniversary as it was during his incarceration in Mandalay jail that Lokmanya Tilak wrote Gita Rahasya, an exposition of the Bhagavadgita. Other areas of cooperation in culture discussed included translation of Indian epics into the Burmese language. FS congratulated Myanmar for successfully holding the Fourth meeting of the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference and assured India's continued support in sharing experiences in constitutionalism and federalism to assist Myanmar in its democratic transition.

In the last few years, both countries have made commendable strides in bilateral ties and explored new avenues of cooperation including fresh investments in oil and gas and power, infrastructure and pharmaceuticals. Both sides have been in discussion to establish a High Capacity High Voltage Grid Interconnection between the Indian power grid and the Myanmar grid. Discussions on the low voltage radial interconnections between North-Eastern states and Myanmar have also progressed. The cooperation in the maritime domain and disaster management has been enhanced. Both countries have also continued to cooperate in various regional and multilateral fora.

(Excerpted from www.mea.gov.in on 5 October 2020)

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Chairman's Statement of the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) 10+1 Session with India

The ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) 10+1 Session with India was held on 12 September 2020. The Meeting was co-chaired by H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, and H.E. Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Minister of

External Affairs of the Republic of India. The Meeting noted with satisfaction the progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity for the period of 2016-2020. The Meeting adopted a new Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-

India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity for the period of 2021-2025 to serve as an action-oriented document to further strengthen the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership in the next five years.

(Excerpted from www.asean.org on 19 September 2020)

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Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Activities

Prime Minister Addresses 17th ASEAN India Summit

The Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi participated in the 17th ASEAN-India Summit at the invitation of H.E. Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Prime Minister of Vietnam, the current Chair of ASEAN on 12 November 2020.

The Summit, which saw the participation of all ten ASEAN Member States, was conducted in virtual format. On COVID-19, the Prime Minister highlighted India's response and broader support to the international community, and welcomed ASEAN's initiatives to fight the pandemic. Prime Minister announced a contribution of US\$ 1 million to the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund.

The Prime Minister also underscored the importance of greater physical and digital connectivity between ASEAN and India and reiterated India's offer of US\$ 1 billion Line of Credit to support ASEAN connectivity. On trade and investment, he underlined the importance of diversification and resilience of supply chains for post-COVID economic recovery. The ASEAN leaders acknowledged India's contribution towards promoting peace and stability in the region and welcomed India's support to ASEAN centrality. The Leaders also welcomed the adoption of the new ASEAN-India Plan of Action for 2021-2025.

The discussions also covered regional and international issues of common interest and concern, including South China Sea and terrorism. Both sides noted the importance of promoting a rules-based order in the region including through upholding adherence to international law, especially the UNCLOS. The leaders affirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability, safety and security in the South China Sea and ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight.

(Excerpted from www.mea.gov.in on 12 November 2020)

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Remarks by EAM during the 6th Roundtable Meeting of ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks (AINTT)

The contemporary relationship between India and the ASEAN was founded very much on our shared interest in globalization. In Asia at least, the ASEAN were pioneers of that process and helped bring India into it. But as it comes under stress today, we need to go beyond its economic and even social definitions. Globalization may be reflected as trade, travel and financial flows. But in reality, it is something very much larger. In fact, what the pandemic has brought out is the indivisible aspect of human existence that underpins globalization. Whether it is climate change, terrorism or indeed pandemics, these are not challenges where those affected have a choice. The limitations of purely national responses or sometimes living in denial have become evident. It, therefore, underlines the need for the international community to work together much more sincerely in search of collective solutions.

As a result, the commodity that is perhaps most valued in international relations today is that of trust. We had already seen in many quarters national security being redefined to include economic security. More recently, this then led to questions and concerns about technology security. The pandemic has now added to that the importance of health security. In fact, the concept

of strategic autonomy that was once fashionable in a unipolar world has now assumed relevance once again in terms of global supply chains. Whatever we may profess, the actions of nations during times of crisis determine how the world really perceives them, and they did bring up many of the risks inherent in the current global economy. Consequently, concerns about supply chains are sought to be mitigated at the very least through greater emphasis on their diversification and resilience.

For exactly these reasons, it is incumbent on all of us to think through these challenges and come up with a more positive and practical model of cooperation. And it is not as though the world lacks good examples even during times of crises. After all, there were many who also shared what they could at this time, whether it was in terms of medicines, supplies or resources. In fact, through their actions what they demonstrated was a need for broader rebalancing as well as a more generous and equitable world view. For India today, this means among other things the urgent requirement to strengthen its national capacities. It also underlines the importance of de-risking critical aspects of societal existence, especially health. And at the same time, complementing the domestic priority

of building an employment generating economy, not just a profit generating one. We call it Atmanirbhar Bharat- self reliant India.

The ASEAN is one of the cross-roads of the global economy. India is the fifth largest economy in the world. We are not only proximate to each other, but together help shape Asia and the world. It is important that at this juncture, we put our heads together. There are conceptual issues to debate including Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific Oceans initiative that we have tabled needs elaboration. As global relationships alter, we too need to take stock. Security, connectivity, economy and politics will jostle for space in your discussions. My remarks today are only meant to remind you all, how much the big picture has changed. As we come out of this pandemic, let us be clear on one fact. The world will never be the same again. That means new thinking, fresh ideas, more imagination and greater openness. We need to go beyond orthodoxies, whether of trade, politics or security. These are domains that all of you debate regularly and I am sure today you will have a very productive discussion.

(Excerpted from www.mea.gov.in on 20 August 2020)

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Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Activities

ASEAN-India Relations and the Rise of Multilateralism in Indo-Pacific and Beyond

The two biggest religions of South-East Asia spread from/ through Indian subcontinent. The biggest temple of the world is not in India but in Cambodia. The languages of our two regions share a lot of common words including the word 'Bhasha' itself which means language. The Indian epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata are as popular in South-East Asia as they are in India. Almost every country in South-East Asia has its own version of Ram Leela. Even today, the coronation ceremony of Thai kings is performed with Indian rituals. All these are testimony to our long cultural and civilization ties.

ASEAN and India share land and maritime borders and there is a lot of scope for enhancing connectivity through land, air and the sea. India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway is an ongoing

effort to enhance road-connectivity between India's North East and the South East Asia. In pursuance to the announcement by Hon'ble Prime Minister at the ASEAN-India Informal Breakfast Summit in Singapore in November 2018, India had commissioned a study on feasibility of establishing an economic corridor through a seamless, efficient and end to end transportation corridor along the existing Trilateral Highway and its extension towards Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam on Jakarta-based think-tank, the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). ERIA has submitted the final report in July this year which will be tabled before the Leaders at the upcoming ASEAN-India Summit in November 2020.

While there is good air-connectivity between India and a few ASEAN

countries such as Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia etc, we are making efforts to improve air connectivity with others in the region as well. Last year, Indigo and Vietjet started air-services between New Delhi/Kolkata and Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City. We are making efforts to enhance connectivity in the digital and cyber domain as well. In the 2015 ASEAN-India Summit, Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a Line of Credit of USD 1 billion for connectivity and infrastructure projects in ASEAN and we are looking for suitable infrastructure and connectivity projects under this LoC.

(Excerpted from www.mea.gov.in on 5 October 2020)

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Excerpted from the Address delivered by MOS at the webinar organised by North-Eastern Hill University

Remarks by Foreign Secretary on the Impact of Neighbourhood First and Act East Policies on the North East

There is no denying the fact that the North East of India is our gateway to East and South East Asia. In foreign policy terms, we might say that the states of the North East are the link between two fundamental pillars of our foreign policy, Neighbourhood First and Act East.

The general trend indicated by this listing is also applicable to other neighbours such as Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar. For example, in Myanmar, we are working on the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project connecting the North East with Myanmar and Thailand.

The first will give the North East access to the sea. The second will provide land connectivity with South East Asia. Two international entry/ exit points were inaugurated at Tamu-Moreh and Rih-Zowkhawthar to increase connectivity with Myanmar.

While road and rail connectivity have improved significantly, we also need to focus on air connectivity in the region. The

new set of airports opened and upgraded under the Udaan scheme in the capitals of the states of the North East, cater to domestic travel. The Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi airport in Guwahati is the only international airport in the North Eastern states.

However, Bagdogra international airport in West Bengal serves Sikkim. As travel and tourism resumes in the aftermath of the ongoing pandemic, we will have to cater to international flights as well.

The potential of mutually beneficially resources and of generating common economic spaces is evident in another area – energy. Bangladesh currently imports 1160 MW of power through adjoining states in India. Hydrocarbons will flow through an India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline.

The power of Himalayan Rivers has been used for the joint benefit of the North East and its neighbours through hydro electric projects in Bhutan. We are also looking at exporting the surplus

hydropower potential of the North East to Bangladesh and Myanmar.

A strong, stable and prosperous North East is the key to building a Self-Reliant India. The Act East Policy of the Prime Minister provides an effective means to achieve it.

The realisation of this dream brings together various Ministries of the Government of India, as also the state governments, which are both implementing agencies and beneficiaries at the ground level.

As we focus on timely completion of infrastructure projects, such as roads, railway lines, port upgradation, border check posts and trading points, both in the North East and across the border, in countries in the neighbourhood, the Ministry of External Affairs will continue to support and facilitate all initiatives in this regard.

(Excerpted from www.mea.gov.in on 10 September 2020)

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Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Activities

ASEAN Regional Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting

Minister of State for External Affairs, Shri V. Muraleedharan participated in the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) held virtually on 12 September 2020 under the Chairmanship of Vietnam. The 27th ARF Foreign Ministers Meeting (FMM) exchanged views on international and regional issues.

The Minister of State presented India's perspectives on the Indo-Pacific Ocean's Initiative, the threat of terrorism,

maritime issues in the context of UNCLOS framework and cooperation for collective response for COVID-19.

The ARF Ministers adopted three Statements, namely, Enhancing Cooperation to Prevent and Respond to Infectious Disease Outbreaks; Treatment of Children Recruited by or Associated with Terrorist Groups; and Cooperation in the Field of Security of and in the Use of ICTs in the Context of International Security.

Under the ARF activities approved for 2020-21 during the meeting, India will co-chair workshops on International Ship and Port facility Security Code (ISPS Code) and on Implementing United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and other international instruments.

(Excerpted from www.mea.gov.in on 12 September 2020)

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Chairman's Press Statement of the ASEAN Coordinating Council's Special Session on Sub-Regional Development

The ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC) held a Special Meeting on Sub-Regional Development on 9 September 2020 via video-conference to discuss sub-regional development across ASEAN and ASEAN's role in promoting sub-regional development to achieve ASEAN Community building objectives.

The Ministers were briefed by the Secretary-General of ASEAN, President of the Asian Development

Bank (ADB) and the President of the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) on their perspectives regarding ASEAN's role in narrowing the development gap and enhancing ASEAN's competitiveness as a region, promoting sustainable and equitable development in the region, and presenting the prospective role of sub-regional cooperation frameworks in regional integration efforts. The Ministers appreciated ADB's long

partnership with ASEAN in promoting sub-regional and regional development as well as its timely support for COVID-19 pandemic response. The Ministers commended efforts by ERIA as a regional think-tank in conducting quality research work to facilitate ASEAN's regional integration process.

(Excerpted from www.asean.org on 11 September 2020)

©ASEAN

India - Vietnam Joint Vision for Peace, Prosperity and People

H.E. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India and H.E. Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Prime Minister of Vietnam co-chaired a Virtual Summit on 21 December 2020, during which they exchanged views on wide-ranging bilateral, regional and global issues and released Joint Vision for Peace, Prosperity and People to guide the future development of India - Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The outcome of the meeting as follows: (a) While adopting this Joint Vision Statement, both Leaders welcomed the signing of Plan of Action for period 2021-2023; (b) Both Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction over the successful implementation of the High Speed Guard Boat (HSGB) Manufacturing Project for Vietnam Border Guard Command under the US\$ 100 million Defence Line of Credit extended by Government of India to Vietnam, and the handing over of completed HSGB to

Vietnam, launch of HSGBs manufactured in India and the keel laying of HSGBs manufactured in Vietnam; (c) Both Leaders appreciated the completion of seven Development Projects with Indian 'Grant-in-Aid' Assistance of US\$ 1.5 million for the benefit of local community in Vietnam's Ninh Thuan province; (d) Both Prime Ministers also expressed satisfaction over signing of MOUs/Agreements/Implementing Arrangements for further strengthening bilateral cooperation in various areas such as implementing Arrangement on Defence Industry Cooperation, agreement for US\$ 5 million Indian Grant Assistance for Army Software Park at National Telecommunications University, Nha Trang, implementing arrangement between CUNPKO-VNDPKO for Cooperation in United Nation Peacekeeping, MOU between India's Atomic Energy Regulatory Board

and Vietnam Agency for Radiation and Nuclear Safety, MOU between CSIR-Indian Institute of Petroleum and Vietnam Petroleum Institute, MOU between National Solar Federation of India and Vietnam Clean Energy Association, MOU between Tata Memorial Centre and Vietnam National Cancer Hospital.

The announcements made in this summit are as follows: 1. Enhancing the number of Quick Impact Projects from currently 5 per year to 10 per year commencing FY 2021-2022; 2. New Development Partnership projects in heritage conservation in Vietnam (F-block of Temple at My Son; Dong Duong Buddhist Monastery in Quang Nam and Nhan Cham Tower in Phu Yen); 3. Launch of a bilateral project for Encyclopedia on India - Vietnam Civilizational and Cultural Interactions.

(Excerpted from www.mea.gov.in on 21 December 2020)

© Ministry of External Affairs, India

News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

India Sends Shipments of Covishield Vaccines to Myanmar, Mauritius, Seychelles

India has sent shipments of Covishield vaccines to Myanmar, Mauritius and Seychelles taking forward its 'Vaccine Maitri' (vaccine diplomacy) drive which has earned it praises from recipient nations. Consignments carrying the vaccine are to reach Myanmar (1.5 million doses), Mauritius (1,00,000 doses) and Seychelles (50,000 doses) on 22 January 2021 according to sources. Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh and Nepal have already received their gifts of the Covishield vaccines from India earlier

this week while some others such as Sri Lanka and Afghanistan are waiting for their turn. "These gifts of vaccines to the neighbouring countries and some others are in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi that India would try to serve the world through its vaccine producing capabilities. It is also earning India a lot of goodwill," the source said.

Myanmar's State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, in her New Year address, had mentioned that there was wide appreciation in her country

for India's willingness to provide Covid-19 vaccines, the source pointed out. India also provided a training course in administering Covid vaccine to Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Bahrain, Brazil, Mauritius, Morocco, Oman, Seychelles and Sri Lanka, the source tracking the matter told BusinessLine.

(Excerpted from www.thehindubusinessline.com on 22 January, 2021, authored by Amiti Sen)

© The Hindu Business Line

Sixth India-CLMV Business Conclave Held Virtually to Build Bridges

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, held the sixth India-CLMV business conclave: Building Bridges for Constructive Development virtually with Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV). The Ministers of Commerce, Minister of State for External Affairs, the Secretary of State from India and CLMV countries participated in the inaugural session of the business conclave. India's Minister of State for External Affairs Shri V. Muraleedharan highlighted India's cooperation with the CLMV region right through the Covid-19 crisis, including the provision of medicines and medical supplies to the region and the training of medical personnel from the region. "India seeks to enhance its cooperation and collaboration with the CLMV region in terms of developing a vaccine for Covid-19 and would be willing to share the vaccine as and when it is ready," added Muraleedharan. The State Minister also mentioned that India's vision of the Indo-Pacific, of which CLMV countries are a part, envisages a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region with an emphasis on ASEAN centrality, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations in the region, peaceful resolution of disputes, avoidance of use or threat of use of force and adherence to international laws, rules and regulations. Shri Muraleedharan invited CLMV countries to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and participate in activities of the seven pillars of Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), which has synergies with the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

While the Cambodian participants explained the investment climate in Cambodia, simplification of procedures for registration of companies, tax benefits, among other incentives, Ms. Khobragade highlighted the sectors and investment opportunities available in Cambodia to Indian companies and encouraged micro, small and medium enterprises from India to set up manufacturing units in Cambodia. The CLMV countries have surfaced as key growth points for the ASEAN region, giving it a wider market outreach resulting in preferential or free trade agreements with larger economies of the world. Towards this end, a project development fund of \$75 million has been created by the Government of India in order to boost investments from the Indian private sector in the CLMV region.

(Excerpted from: www.khmertimeskh.com on 9 December 2020)
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Washington Partners with Mekong Nations

The Trump administration has announced the ambitious Mekong-US partnership which aims to curb China's growing influence in Southeast Asia and promote economic independence of partner nations.

Apart from the US, the coalition includes Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam from Southeast Asia. It was formally launched after a virtual meeting on September 11 2020.

The Mekong-US partnership reflects the importance of the Mekong region to the United States, Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo said.

He added that these efforts will include working closely with Japan, Australia, South Korea, India, and other like-minded partners.

"Our relationship with Mekong partner countries is an integral part of our Indo-Pacific vision and our strategic partnership with ASEAN," he said.

(Excerpted from www.business-standard.com on 5 August 2020)

© Business Standard

News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

India Ready to Tie-up with ASEAN in Generics, Medical Tech for Fighting Covid-19

India is willing to collaborate with the ten-member ASEAN in the production of generic drugs and medical technologies used for treatment of Covid-19 patients, Commerce and Industry Minister Shri Piyush Goyal said.

"India welcomes the initiatives of ASEAN to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and the establishment of the ASEAN Covid-19 Response Fund," Goyal said at the 8th East Asia Summit Economic Ministers' Meeting, held virtually, adding that the two sides could work together in fighting Covid-19 by jointly producing generics and technology.

In their joint press statement, the Ministers also agreed to facilitate supply chain connectivity, including for essential goods such as medical supplies, medicines, including vaccines, food, commodities and other essential supplies and services in the region.

Regional initiatives to mitigate the impact of the pandemic including the establishment of the ASEAN Covid-19 Response Fund were also supported by the Ministers. They also recognised the importance of the work towards the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies and the Standard Operating Procedures for Public Health Emergencies Response.

Highlighting India's role in helping the world meet the Covid-19 challenge, Goyal said that even when the country was unable to get its medical supplies from the rest of the world, it provided medical assistance, in the form of essential drugs, test kits and protection gear to over 150 countries and as grants-in-aid to over 80 countries.

(Excerpted from www.thehindubusinessline.com on 25 August 2020)
© The Hindu Business Line

Greater Cooperation: India, ASEAN Adopt Plan of Action for 2021-25

India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted the Plan of Action for 2021-25 that envisages greater cooperation in areas ranging from trade to maritime security and counter-terrorism. The Plan of Action will help the two sides to work towards the ASEAN 2025 vision for an economically integrated and rules-based grouping that narrows the development gap and enhances connectivity. Both sides will also cooperate on common challenges and enhance coordination at international forums.

The virtual ASEAN-India Ministerial Meeting, co-chaired by External Affairs Minister Hon'ble S Jaishankar and his Thai counterpart Mr. Don Pramudwinai, adopted the Plan of Action. The meeting, which was joined by the Foreign Ministers of the 10 ASEAN states, also discussed ways to strengthen cooperation to fight the Covid-19 pandemic and witnessed an exchange of views on regional and international developments. The meeting reviewed the ASEAN-India strategic partnership in several areas, including maritime cooperation, connectivity and people-to-people contacts. It reviewed preparations for the upcoming ASEAN-India Summit and progress in implementing key decisions made at the last summit in Bangkok in November 2019.

Under the new Plan of Action, the two sides will further strengthen the East Asia Summit "as a premier leaders-led forum for dialogue and cooperation on broad strategic, political and economic issues... with the aim of promoting peace, stability and economic prosperity in the region". The plan envisages India's active participation and co-chairing of joint exercises and activities, and strengthening of practical defence cooperation to address challenges in maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping operations, and cyber-security. The two sides will also promote maritime security and safety, freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded commerce, the non-use of force, and the resolution of disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

(Excerpted from www.hindustantimes.com on 13 September 2020)
© Hindustan Times

India Set to Deepen Engagement and Strengthen Ties with Indo-ASEAN-Oceanic Region

According to Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge) of Housing and Urban Affairs; Minister of State (Independent Charge) of Civil Aviation and Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, Government of India, India was seeking to deepen and strengthen its ties with the Indo-ASEAN-Oceanic region (IAOR). The Minister was speaking at the Inaugural Session of the Indo-ASEAN Oceanic Business Summit & Expo: Collaborating for Regional Economic Development which was organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

The Minister stated that digital technologies such as E-commerce, Fintech, Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain etc. held the maximum promise for collaboration between India and the countries in the IAOR region. He mentioned that a review of the ASEAN - India Free Trade Agreement was still pending. Once completed, he felt that it would have the potential to double trade between India and ASEAN. In the aviation sector itself, he stated that the Government was moving ahead with the privatisation of airports and this presented a huge opportunity for countries from the IAOR region. He also mentioned that the MRO (Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul) sector had also been opened up and that would also present a major opportunity for collaboration. As far as India was concerned, the Minister stated that he had faith in Indian Industry and expected that they would bounce back to normal once a vaccine for Covid - 19 was found.

(Excerpted from www.business-standard.com on 5 August 2020)
© Business Standard

News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

Indo-Pacific Outreach: India Reaches out to Cambodia with Flood Relief

Indian Naval Ship “INS Kiltan” delivered 15 tons of flood relief material containing 3,000 flood relief kits for the flood affected people in Cambodia as part of Delhi’s Indo-Pacific outreach. INS Kiltan arrived at Sihanouville Port on December 29 under Indian Navy’s Mission SAGAR-III, which is being undertaken in accordance with Hon’ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision for Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), according to an official statement.

On December 30, in a ceremony held at the Sihanouville Port, on behalf of India, B. Subba Rao, Charge d’Affaires Indian Embassy handed over 15 tonnes flood relief material to Hang Samoeun, Permanent Vice President of the National Committee for Disaster

Management and Advisor to PM Hun Sen. Samoeun recalled the strong bonds of friendship between the two countries and thanked India for their kind gesture to help the flood affected people of Cambodia.

The visit and port call of INS Kiltan to Sihanouville port for delivering 15 tonnes of flood relief material to Cambodia, under “Mission SAGAR”, is a part of India’s Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) assistance to Friendly Foreign Countries and highlights the importance that India attaches to Cambodia, a close maritime neighbour, officials said.

(Excerpted from: www.khmertimeskh.com on 31 December 2020)
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India To Help Train Cambodian Youths in Temple Preservation

India is planning to assist Cambodia in training its youths in temple conservation as well as in the fields of arts and culture as the two countries shared similar artistic and cultural forms. The training project was revealed by outgoing Indian Ambassador to Cambodia Ms. Manika Jain during her farewell meeting

with Hang Pov, Director General of the Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA), in Siem Reap province.

(Excerpted from: www.khmertimeskh.com on 10 September 2020)
© Khmer Times

Indian Cabinet Gives Its Nods for MoU between India and Cambodia in Health Sector

The Indian Cabinet on 29 October, 2020 approved the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Cambodia for cooperation in the field of health and medicine. The MoU will encourage cooperation between the two countries through joint initiatives and technology development in the health sector, the Health Ministry said in a statement. “It will strengthen bilateral ties between India and Cambodia. The MoU shall become effective on the date of its signature and shall remain in force for a period of five years,” it said.

The main areas of cooperation between the two governments include mother and child health, family planning, HIV/AIDS and TB, drugs and pharmaceuticals, technology transfer, public health and epidemiology, disease control, and medical research and development, the statement said. The MoU will also include areas of medical education, health manpower development in the field of public health, training in clinical, para-clinical and management skills, and any other area of cooperation as may be mutually decided upon.

(Excerpted from: www.khmertimeskh.com on 30 October 2020)
© Khmer Times

India Holds Webinar with Cambodia to Boost Defence Cooperation

The Indian government held a webinar with officials of the Cambodian Army to boost defence cooperation, said an official statement. “Senior MoD (Ministry of Defence) officials from the Indian side and senior army officials from the Cambodian side participated in the webinar and spoke about enhancing defence cooperation between both the nations,” the statement noted. The webinar is part of a series of webinars being organised with

friendly foreign countries in order to boost Indian defence exports and achieve the defence export target of US\$ 5 billion in the next five years, the Defence Ministry’s statement noted.

The theme of the webinar was “Indian Defence Industry Global Outreach for Collaborative Partnership: Webinar and Expo”, said the statement. Various Indian companies such as Alpha Design Technologies Pvt Ltd, Larsen and

Toubro, Tata Advanced Systems Pvt Ltd, Bharat Electronics Limited, Bharat Forge Ltd, Ashok Leyland Ltd and Mahindra Defence Systems Pvt Ltd made presentations about their defence equipment at the webinar.

“The webinar was attended by more than 200 delegates and 100 virtual exhibition stalls have been set up in the Expo,” the statement said.

(Excerpted from: www.outlookindia.com on 25 September 2020)
© Outlook

News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

Indian Government Gives \$ 1.5 Million Worth of Demining Equipment for the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces

The Indian government is providing \$1.5 million worth of demining equipment for the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces' peacekeeping operation. A signing ceremony was presided over by Defence Minister General Tea Banh. The agreements were signed by Indian Ambassador to Cambodia Ms. Manika Jain and Defence Ministry's Permanent Secretary of State General Neang Phat.

At the event, Gen Banh said one of the challenges the Kingdom faces is not having enough demining equipment for its peacekeeping operations and the need to upgrade the Blue Helmets' capability and capacity. Ambassador Ms. Manika said at the event that India is committed to expanding and deepening the countries' cooperation, especially in defence-related activities and also in peacekeeping

operations. She said the Indian government is also deeply committed in continuing its human resource development and training programmes for peacekeeping forces, language training, or any other training – whether it's for naval, air force or armed forces personnel – under The India Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme in India. "This demining assistance continues to be a key point of cooperation between the two countries. The current grant of \$1.5 million from the Government of India is part of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces' demining capacity enhancement," the statement said.

(Excerpted from: www.khmertimeskh.com on 11 August 2020)
© Khmer Times

India Offers Scholarships to Cambodian Students in Health Sector

The Government of India, through the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), has announced to offer scholarships to Cambodian students to pursue their medical studies in Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy (AYUSH) in India.

The Ministry of AYUSH, under its "International Scholarship Programme", extends financial support to the eligible foreign students for undertaking AYUSH degree courses in premier institutes in India, said the Embassy of India in Phnom Penh in a recent announcement.

(Excerpted from: www.khmertimeskh.com on 16 July 2020)
© Khmer Times

Indian PM Modi Hails Cambodia's Virus Prevention Efforts

Hon'ble Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi praised the Cambodian government on its "effective control" of the pandemic, calling its response as "a model for the world". His remarks were made during a phone conversation with Prime Minister Hun Sen on June 11, 2020 where they discussed several issues, including the COVID-19 pandemic which has ravaged countries worldwide.

After the call, Mr Modi took to Twitter to acknowledge its significant ties with the Kingdom. "India shares deep cultural and historical links with Cambodia – an important partner in our extended neighbourhood. I conveyed India's commitment to further strengthening its relationship with Cambodia in all areas," the Indian premier wrote.

The Cambodian Foreign Affairs Ministry, in a statement, said the two leaders tackled joint efforts in combating the coronavirus. "His Excellency Modi praised Samdech Techo Hun Sen and the Royal Government of Cambodia for achieving effective control of the COVID-19 outbreak thereby serving as a model for the world," the statement said. "The two Prime Ministers thanked each other for the attention and facilities [that both have] provided to enable the repatriation of their respective nationals stranded in both countries," the statement added.

(Excerpted from: www.khmertimeskh.com on 11 June 2020)

© Khmer Times

India, Lao PDR Highlight Need for Global Cooperation in Post-COVID World

India and the Lao PDR on 12 June 2020 agreed on the need for international cooperation to prepare for a post-Covid world. During their telephonic conversation on June 12, Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Lao People's Democratic Republic counterpart H E Thongloun Sisoulith also exchanged views on the health and economic challenges posed by the pandemic.

An official statement said that Modi commended the effective measures taken by the government to contain the spread of the pandemic in Lao PDR. "Both leaders agreed on the need for international cooperation, and for sharing of best-practices and experiences, in order to prepare for the post-Covid world," the statement said. PM Modi highlighted India's historic and cultural links with the Lao PDR and expressed satisfaction at being involved in the restoration of the World Heritage Site at Vat Phou. PM Thongloun Sisoulith thanked Modi for India's support for Lao PDR's development programmes, in capacity-building and for scholarships. The Prime Minister reiterated India's commitment to continue its development partnership with the Lao PDR, a valued partner in India's extended neighbourhood, the statement said.

(Excerpted from www.deccanherald.com on 13 June 2020)
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News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

To Avoid Overdependence on China, Cambodia Needs to Build Its Relations with India

As its economy is severely affected by the dual impact of COVID-19 and the EU's withdrawal of "Everything But Arms" trade privileges, Cambodia should look to India for support.

What is more, India has been providing various forms of aid and assistance to Cambodia. Quick Impact Projects, which is at the core of India's aid program to Cambodia, focuses on social development, gender empowerment, and the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals. Each year, India provides 25 scholarships to Cambodian students to pursue higher education in India and offers short capacity building programs for Cambodian government officials.

To support Cambodia's demining efforts, India donated 15 sniffer dogs in 2016. It recently provided \$1.5 million worth of demining equipment to assist Cambodia's peacekeeping operations. India has been one of the original contributors to Cambodia's national budget for the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), also known as the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, since its establishment in 2006. Under the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), India has helped Cambodia to build the MGC Asian Traditional Textiles Museum in Siem Reap and offered

training courses on conservation and preservation to the museum staff.

Considering India's role in Southeast Asia in general and its role in Cambodia in particular, it is imperative for Cambodia to look westward and increase its engagement with India. In times of increasing uncertainty caused by the U.S.-China competition and the COVID-19 crisis, as well as the economic slowdown triggered by COVID-19, Cambodia needs to deepen its relations with India.

To engage India meaningfully, Cambodia should look for alternative ways to create a conducive environment for Indian investors to increase their investments in Cambodia. Taking advantage of India's 1.3 billion people is obviously the way forward for Cambodia, which is seeking to diversify its export markets after the European Union's partial withdrawal of the Everything But Arms (EBA) trade scheme that Cambodia has enjoyed since 2001.

To boost people-to-people engagement, Cambodia needs to proactively engage India to enhance various forms of collaboration and interactions. Cambodia can frankly talk to the Indian government about its need for more support to develop its human capital. The Cambodian government

can ask India through the Indian embassy in Phnom Penh to provide more scholarships to Cambodian students and government officials. At the moment, India offers about 25 government scholarships to Cambodians per year. This number is low if compared to some 180 scholarships given by the Chinese government to Cambodians annually.

In sum, through historical, cultural, and economic ties, Cambodia can deepen and take its relations with India to new heights. Cambodia has to bring in the Indian card to balance China's economic and geopolitical influence in Cambodia as well as in Southeast Asia, which is causing concerns among ASEAN members and Cambodia's key partners such as Japan, the European Union, and the United States.

As India can play a pivotal role in strengthening multipolarity in the region and India's rise seems to be inevitable, Cambodia must step up to engage India now and in the future to take advantage of the opportunities that the forthcoming Indian rise has to offer.

(Excerpted from *www.thediplomat.com* on 21 August, 2020, authored by Bunna Vann and Kimkong Heng)
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India Approves Additional Investment of US\$ 121.27 million for Shwe Oil & Gas Project in Myanmar

On June 24, 2020, in a major development, the Union Cabinet approved additional investment by ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL) towards further development of Shwe oil & gas project in Myanmar. The decision was taken in a cabinet meeting chaired by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The participation of India's PSU giant in oil & gas exploration and development projects in neighbouring countries is aligned with India's Act East Policy, and also part of India's strategy to develop Energy Bridges with its neighbours

in addition to further strengthening India's energy security needs. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved an additional investment of US\$ 121.27 million (about Rs 909 crores) by ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) towards further development of Shwe oil & gas project in Myanmar. ONGC Videsh (OVL) has been associated with exploration and development of Shwe gas project in Myanmar since 2002, as part of a consortium of companies from South Korea, India and Myanmar. The Indian PSU, GAIL, is also a co-investor

in this project. OVL has invested US\$ 722 million (about Rs 3949 crores, as per corresponding average annual exchange rate) till 31st March 2019 in this project. The first gas from the Shwe Project was received in July 2013 and plateau production was reached in December 2014. The Project has been generating positive cash flows since FY 2014-15.

(Excerpted from *www.nenow.in* on 24 June 2020)
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News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

India, Laos to Discuss Raising Bilateral Trade as MEA Pushes for Diversity in Markets

The Ministry of External Affairs is keen on focussing on all markets, however small, to help Indian exporters look for opportunities amidst global restructuring of supply chains due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the spotlight this week will be on Lao PDR — one of the smallest nations within the ten-member ASEAN. Indian exporters and their counterparts from Laos will discuss opportunities for increasing trade and investment between the two countries at a video conference organised by the Indian Embassy in Lao PDR, in association with exporters' body FIEO, this week, an official told BusinessLine.

The MEA has started the exercise of roping in its consulates world over to help push India's exports wherever possible with the objective of not only increasing but diversifying trade. "India and Laos have shared friendly relations for the past many decades and have

been reliable trade partners. However, India's share in Laos' imports is still very small and much below China's. There is a lot of potential for increase and the effort of the government will be to build on the existing potential," the official said. India's total trade with Laos reached \$28.18 million in 2019-20 out of which exports were worth \$ 25 million. The country's export to Laos was small compared to China's exports worth \$1.7 billion. "Due to the pandemic and the strained relations between China and many of its trading partners, a shift in supply chains is likely to happen. This is the right time for Indian exporters to push in markets where their presence is low," the official said. Electrical machinery and equipment, pharmaceuticals, vehicles, ceramics and organic chemicals are a few of the main products exported from India to Lao PDR. The objective of the video conference is to understand the

present status of economic situation in Lao PDR in view of Covid-19 and formulate roadmap/strategies that need to be followed to enhance India's share in Lao PDR imports, according to FIEO. Senior officials from Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) and the Ministry of Commerce have been invited to join the session, the official said. Laos is not only important for India in terms of being a market for goods, but also for investments. In fact, the Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV) corridor is one of the fastest-growing sub-regions within the ASEAN and India also has plans to promote investments in the four countries which could serve as a gateway for it to the rest of South Asia.

(Excerpted from www.thehindubusinessline.com on 21 August 2020)
© The Hindu Business Line

Indian submarine INS Sindhuvir Officially Inducted into Myanmar Navy

On 25 December 2020, Myanmar officially inducted a submarine handed over by India in the month of October. INS Sindhuvir was commissioned as UMS Minye Theinkhathu and inducted on the 73rd anniversary of the Myanmar Navy. During the commissioning ceremony, Indian ambassador to Myanmar H E Saurabh Kumar was also present along with top brass of Myanmar's Navy.

This is the first time India has given a submarine to any country and shows growing defence cooperation between the two neighbouring countries. The Indian side has been training Myanmar Naval personnel. Last year, Indian and Myanmar naval undertook joint exercises IMNEX 2019 in Bay of Bengal.

(Excerpted from www.zeenews.india.com on 26 December 2020)
© ZEE NEWS

India, Myanmar Discuss Operationalisation of Sittwe Port, Indian Side Announces New Initiatives

India's Foreign Secretary Shri Harsh Shringla and Indian Army Chief General M M Naravane concluded a two-day visit to Myanmar on October 5, 2020 with the focus on taking forward bilateral ties in areas ranging from economic cooperation to security. This was the first time an Indian delegation to Myanmar included both officials. Myanmar already received a consignment of 3,000 vials of drug Remdesivir from the Indian side for treating Covid-19 patients.

India announced a quota for importing 150,000 tonnes of urad dal from Myanmar till March 2021, and a grant of \$2 million for building a bridge at Byanyu-Sarsichauk in

Chin state to ramp up economic connectivity between Mizoram and Myanmar, people familiar with developments said on condition of anonymity. During their meeting with Suu Kyi (Myanmar's state counsellor) at the foreign ministry in Naypyitaw, Shringla and Naravane discussed the "possibility of joint production of Covid-19 vaccine, operationalisation of the Sittwe port in the early part of 2021 and conducting vocational training programmes for youth in Rakhine state", Myanmar's foreign ministry said in a Facebook post.

(Excerpted from www.hindustantimes.com on 5 October 2020, authored by Rezaul H Laskar)
© Hindustan Times

News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

SC Allows Centre to Continue Construction Work of India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project

On 11th August, Supreme Court allowed the Centre to continue the construction work of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project even as the Manipur High Court is hearing the dispute over the contract between the government and a construction firm.

A bench of the apex court, headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad Arvind Bobde, said that the court is of the view that the work should go on with regard to the importance of the project. "However in the interest of justice, we request the Manipur High Court to expeditiously dispose of the matter within a period of two weeks," the bench said. Appearing for the Centre, Attorney General KK Venugopal said, "We have received a letter from our ambassador in Myanmar saying that China completes its projects swiftly and on time but India's

credibility is under question." India has to start the construction of the first bridge so that Myanmar is not frustrated, he added. "There is no stay on the project at this moment. We will start functioning on the first bridge. Our agencies can start on the project. Please do not pass any orders which would prevent us from taking advantage of the situation," the Attorney General told the bench.

The bench noted that the Union of India is free to carry on its work because the stay expired in September last year. Last month, the top court had cleared a major roadblock in the completion of the Trilateral Highway Connectivity project by staying the litigation initiated by the defaulting contractor before the Manipur High Court.

According to media reports, the project was awarded to Niraj Cement

Structurals Limited and Manipur Tribal Development Corporation Limited in 2017. However, due to delays, the Centre terminated the contract in 2018, following which Niraj Cement challenged the order of termination.

The 1,360 km long India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway is an initiative pertaining to the three countries. India is undertaking the construction of two sections of the Trilateral Highway in Myanmar namely -- the construction of 120.74 km Kalewa-Yagyi road section and construction of 69 bridges along with the approach road on the 149.70 km Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa (TKK) road section.

(Excerpted from www.auto.economicstimes.indiatimes.com on 11 August 2020)
© Auto.com from *Economics Times*

Border Trade between India and Myanmar to Resume

Border trade between India and Myanmar in the Sagaing region will resume after it was stopped in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The international gate at the border was closed in March due to the pandemic.

The authorities have decided to resume the trade with strict Covid-19 protocols. "Border trade will resume on January 6, but there will be some changes as the virus has also spread in India. We need to discuss how to prevent infection while carrying on with the trade," Myanmar Times quoted an official as saying.

Most of the vehicles engaged in the India-Myanmar border trade pass through Tamu crossing and the Reed crossing in Chin state.

(Excerpted from www.nenow.in 5 January 2021)

© North East Now

India Lauds Thailand's Handling of Covid Crisis: To Send 7-8 Repatriation Flights to the Country to Get Back Indians

India's envoy to Thailand H E Suchitra Durai has lauded Thailand's handling of the COVID crisis and said India has brought to notice to Thailand about India's ASEAN scholarships which can be "used under the current situation". Speaking exclusively to our Principal Diplomatic Correspondent Sidhant Sibal from Bangkok, the Indian envoy said 1600 Indians have registered for repatriation for which India is expected to send 7-8 flights.

On the first of May, Hon'ble PM Modi had a telephonic conversation with the Hon'ble Thai PM and it was a detailed telephonic conversation and both sides shared all the steps they are taking to deal with COVID. Also, both sides talked about how they can cooperate in research and development in the medical area. PM Modi also assured Thailand, any medical support needed by Thailand during this time, India will be happy to facilitate it. Our relations are very warm, historic and very close and the fact,

Thailand is our maritime neighbour is a very important aspect, so the bilateral aspect we have underlined the areas. In the ASEAN context, we have offered 1000 slots for post doctoral fellowships and some of these are in targeted drugs, robotics, this is the time. Thailand is one of the 10 countries who will be facilitated through post-doctoral fellowship. We have brought this to the notice of the Thai side and emphasised young researchers on both sides can work in all these areas and this is will be used under the current situation. As far as BIMSTEC is concerned, PM has been speaking to the leadership of all the BIMSTEC countries. PM had taken the initiative to launch SAARC COVID 19 emergency fund. This is how we have been working bilaterally with Thailand. This was stated by Suchitra Durai to WION.

(Excerpted from www.wionews.com on 14 May 2020)
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News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

US\$ 5 million Provided to the Government of Myanmar for India-Myanmar Border Area Development

During a call on Lt-Gen Ye Aung, Minister for Border Affairs, Government of Myanmar by Shri Saurabh Kumar, the Ambassador of India to Myanmar on August 28, a cheque was handed over for US\$ 5 million for the third year of the India-Myanmar Border Area Development.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on India-Myanmar Border Area Development was signed during the visit of Prime Minister of India to Myanmar in May 2012. According to this MoU, India would grant US\$ 5 million per annum for the basic infrastructure and livelihood

development of the Chin State and Naga Self-Administered Zone. Under the third year projects, nine roads and bridges and five schools have been constructed in Chin State. The projects have been undertaken in nine townships with 82 beneficial villages.

The beneficiaries include an estimated 28,000 people. Similarly in Naga Self-Administered Zone, 14 roads and bridges and six schools and one healthcare centre have been constructed in around three township areas covering 80 villages. An estimated 49,000 villagers have benefitted from the

project. Overall, in the third cycle of India-Myanmar Border Area Development, so far 141 projects of construction of roads and bridges, healthcare centres, schools and other facilities in Chin State and Naga Self-Administered Zone have been implemented or are in advance stages of implementation.

The Government of India will continue to work with Government of Myanmar to further extend assistance in the Border Areas.

(Excerpted from www.mizzima.com on 30 August 2020)
© mizzima

India, Vietnam Agree to Strengthen Indo-Pacific Partnership; Explore Closer Co-op in Nuclear Energy and Space

India and its key SE Asian partner Vietnam on 25th August decided to explore closer cooperation in emerging areas -- civil nuclear energy, space, marine sciences and new technologies and decided to expand their Indo-Pacific partnership. India and Vietnam agreed to enhance their bilateral cooperation in line with India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the ASEAN's Outlook on Indo-Pacific to achieve shared security, prosperity and growth for all in the region. India invited Vietnam to collaborate on one of the seven pillars of the IPOI. This is significant in the backdrop of Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific region including South China Sea region.

The outcomes were result of the 17th Meeting of the India-Vietnam Joint Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation co-chaired by Dr. S. Jaishankar and Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Vietnam.

The meet was held via video-conference on 25th August. On the occasion the two sides signed MoU for "cooperation between Sushma Swaraj

Institute of Foreign Service (SSIFS), New Delhi and Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, Hanoi" and "MoU between National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi and Scientific Research Institute of Sea and Islands, Hanoi" were also signed on the margins of the Joint Commission Meeting.

During the meeting, both sides reviewed the recent developments in India-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and discussed the future trajectory of their wide-ranging engagement. They agreed to add new momentum to the economic and defence engagement between the two countries and to explore closer cooperation in emerging areas such as civil nuclear energy, space, marine sciences and new technologies, according to a MEA statement.

The External Affairs Minister reaffirmed India's development and capacity building assistance to Vietnam through initiatives such as Quick Impact Projects (QIP), ITEC and e-ITEC initiatives, PhD fellowships, as well as projects in water resource management in Vietnam's

Mekong Delta region, SDGs, digital connectivity and heritage conservation.

12 QIPs for implementation in Vietnam have been approved by the Government of India, including 7 QIPs in water resource management in Vietnam's Mekong Delta Region and 5 QIPs related to construction of educational infrastructure in Vietnam.

Based on their strong convergence of views on many global and regional issues, both sides agreed to coordinate closely at multilateral forums, including at the UN Security Council, where both India and Vietnam will serve concurrently as non-permanent members in 2021.

They also agreed to step up cooperation and coordination at important regional forums under the ASEAN framework. He expressed India's full support to Vietnam's chairmanship of ASEAN this year and appreciated the positive leadership provided by Vietnam to ASEAN in a year when the world is faced with the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Excerpted from www.economicstimes.com on 25 August 2020)
© The Economic Times.

News on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

India Funds Seven Water Management Projects in Four Vietnam's Mekong Delta Provinces

The Indian Government will support seven water management projects in the Mekong Delta provinces of Ben Tre, Hau Giang, Kien Giang, and Tien Giang with non-refundable aid of USD 350,000. The MOUs, each worth USD 50,000, were signed by the Consul General of India at Ho Chi Minh City, Dr. Madan Mohan Sethi and officials of the four beneficiary provinces, in the presence of Ambassador of India to Vietnam H E Pranay Verma and Deputy Head of the Foreign Ministry's General Economic Department Pham Thi Anh.

They are part of 26 quick-impact projects funded by India in 22 Vietnamese cities and provinces, 13 of which have been completed while 12 others will be launched during the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Speaking at the event, Indian Ambassador H E Pranay Verma said the traditional relationship between the two nations is a successful model

in terms of institutional support and capacity improvement in various fields over the past years. Deputy Head of the Foreign Ministry's General Economic Department Pham Thi Anh said the activity is a symbol of the enduring friendship among member states of the Mekong - Ganga Cooperation (MGC) as well as between Vietnam and India.

It has been reported that the Mekong Delta experienced record saline intrusion in the 2015-2016 and 2019-2020 dry seasons, seriously affecting local production and daily life. The region is forecast to see a high level of drought and saltwater intrusion in the upcoming 2020-2021 dry season, with about 5.3-6.1 percent of its total rice area and 14-23 percent of its fruit-growing area affected. Some 70,600 local households will also face water shortages. On the same day, at a meeting with representatives of Mekong

Delta localities in My Tho city of Tien Giang province, which sought ways to respond to risks from drought and saltwater intrusion during the 2020-2021 dry season, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc stressed, "No households should be left without water and water storage measures are very much in need."

The PM assigned the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to speed up the implementation of major irrigation and water supply projects and the Ministry of Health to guide the localities in monitoring water quality. Apart from drought and saltwater intrusion, attention should also be paid to flood prevention, he said, stressing that it is necessary to protect human life and property during flooding.

(Excerpted from www.vietnamtimes.org.vn on 24 September 2020)

© Vietnam Times

India Business Matching Week 2020 (Lifestyle Products) Witnessed Strong Business Results and Ended with a Grand Success

The Thailand-India Business Matching Week 2020 (Lifestyle Products) was held from 21-25 September 2020 (Monday - Friday). The essence of this trade platform was for SMEs, Brands & OEM suppliers from Thailand to connect with industry buyers from India to create new partnership opportunities by capturing the robust demand for trendy lifestyle products from Thailand. More

than 300 business matching meetings took place during the period of this business matching event and Indian buyers were positive about the quality of products brought to the table by the Thai exhibitors. The surge in business due to this interaction is estimated to amount to more than USD 6 million worth of business which will be generated over the course of the coming months. The

Thailand - India Business Matching Week was organised by The Office of SMEs Promotion (OSMEP) Ministry of Industry, Thailand, supported by the Retailers Association of India (RAI) and the Small & Medium Business Development Chamber of India (SME Chamber of India).

(Excerpted from www.outlookindia.com on 8 October, 2020)

© Outlook India

Connectivity Projects, Border Haats Can Transform Indo-Myanmar Partnership

The ongoing connectivity projects between India and Myanmar and border haats can be gamechanger for sub-regional linkages as part of Indo-Pacific construct. This was flagged at the Asian Confluence (Think tank) hosted webinar "Brahmaputra-Ayeyarwady Dialogue: India Myanmar Cooperation for Prosperous Border Zone". The discussion held tried to assess the opportunities and challenges on the current agendas of collaboration, bring together a renewed narrative of cooperation post-COVID era.

In his Inaugural address, Ambassador Saurabh Kumar, India's Ambassador to Myanmar, recalled his visit to border areas and highlighted the role of the Border Area Development program put in by the Government of India and how it has helped in developing socio-economic institutes in Chin state and Naga-Self Administered areas. In the keynote address Dr. Najma Heptulla, Governor, Manipur advocated the revival of border trade and underlined the crucial role of trade and connectivity in the transformation of border states.

She also brought about the unmatched potential of the tourism sector in NER and said, "North-East Region is a paradise unexplored for national and international tourists". She also underlined cultural and academic engagements between NER and Myanmar and talked about the Burmese language schools in Manipur Universities and other educational institutions.

(Excerpted from www.wionews.com on 14 May 2020)

© WION

From Pagodas in Myanmar to Shiva Temple in Lao PDR, How India Is Helping Countries Restore Cultural Heritage

Playing an important role in the restoration of cultural heritage in several countries across the region, from Sri Lanka to Myanmar to Vietnam to Bhutan, India has taken a lead in helping nations restore lost glory. In this endeavour, the Ministry of External Affairs' (MEA) new division -- the Development Partnership Administration or DPA-IV - has emerged as the key, coordinating several such projects spearheaded by India.

In South-East Asia, the focus is on Myanmar, Lao, Cambodia and Vietnam. In Myanmar, conservation of earthquake-damaged Pagodas at Bagan is underway. In Lao, restoration of Vat Phou Shiva temple is being carried out in two stages. Vat Phou Shiva is Lord Shiva temple dating back to 5th and 6th century AD and predates the famous Angkor Wat. The water from the spring behind the temple is considered to be sacred. The second phase of the project

began in November 2018 and is likely to continue until 2028.

In Cambodia, India has committed to carry out the restoration of the ancient temple of "Preah Vihar" built during the period of the Khmer Empire. In Vietnam, India is restoring, "My Son group of temples" which are regarded as one of the prime Hindu temple complexes in Southeast Asia. The temple complex was built in the 9th century AD under the reign of King Indravarman II.

During the restoration work, the Archaeological Survey of India made a discovery of the monolithic sandstone Shiva Linga. Tweeting on this, External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar called the discovery a "reaffirming a civilizational connect" and a "great cultural example of India's development partnership. The Ministry of External Affairs has completed over 49 projects all around the globe which includes

cultural and heritage restoration projects in Malaysia, Mongolia, Bahrain, Israel, Turkestan, France, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Indonesia, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam.

The DPA-IV division also plans to promote restoration and revival of intangible cultural heritage like language, rituals, practices, performing and other fine arts in an institutional manner. This is expected to be broadened to scripture preservation and digitization of manuscripts. India had in 1986 sent teams of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for the restoration of "Angkor Wat". Other examples of India's restoration projects include temple complex at "Ta Prohm" in Cambodia.

(Excerpted from www.dnaindia.com on 3 July 2020 authored by Sidhant Sibal)
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A Stronger India Contributes to the Global Good

Today, India celebrates its 74th Independence Day. For a country with an ancient past, this may seem short, but it is a period marked by long strides.

The path is not without hurdles. The Covid-19 pandemic is a crisis of unprecedented scale for the entire world. It is particularly so for populous, open, federal democracies. While the total case load in India may appear high, effective domestic management has enabled a recovery rate of 68.2%. Both the central and provincial governments have taken steps to ramp up hospital ICU beds, availability of ventilators, PPE and essential medicines.

During this period, Indians also worked hard to ensure that global medical supply chains were not disrupted. By exporting/gifting essential medicines to more than 150 countries in the world (including Thailand) India lived up to its title of the "Pharmacy of the World". India's research laboratories and vaccine production facilities are part of global efforts for an effective

vaccine and irrespective of who develops a successful one, Indian vaccine production facilities will play a role in enabling uninterrupted global supply.

On May 1, both India's Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha agreed on the telephone, inter alia, to pursue cooperation in the area of medical research and development.

Another significant layer of engagement is at the sub-regional level. India is the oldest partner of the lower Mekong countries -- this year, the Mekong Ganga Cooperation completes 20 years. As one of the Bay of Bengal littoral countries, we are partners in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). In 2019, India also joined the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) as a development partner.

The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme, started in

1964, has grown exponentially but its ethos remains unchanged -- cooperation at the request of the recipient state; mutually beneficial partnership; responsible financial assistance. Under the ASEAN-India rubric, India has offered 1,000 post-doctoral fellowships at the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology, of which Thailand will get 100 slots. The areas identified -- AI, robotics, machine learning, targeted drugs -- all fit into Thailand's Industry 4.0.

India's Vision of the Indo-Pacific stated by Prime Minister Modi at the Shangri La Dialogue in June, 2018 complements the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

It is an inclusive vision with ASEAN centrality at its core. PM Modi also outlined a major Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative at the East Asia Summit in Bangkok in November 2019.

(Excerpted from www.bangkokpost.com on 15 August 2020, authored by Suchitra Durai)
© Bangkok Post

Re-imagining the Neighbourhood through Subregional Connectivity

As India re-imagines its neighbourhood, cross-border connectivity through subregions is playing a critical role. The idea of re-integrating its neighbourhood through a subregional approach began to emerge in the late 1990s, but it was only in the mid-2000s that a sustained push for subregional connectivity started to take concrete shape. India's geographic location and size makes it a natural connector for its immediate neighbours and beyond.

Delhi is aware of the critical role it has in enhancing connectivity in its neighbourhood, both in land and at sea. Having failed to push regional connectivity initiatives under the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) framework, India's shifted the focus on subregional connectivity. Connectivity projects were initiated at bilateral, trilateral and subregional levels to expand cross-border transport infrastructure.

Delhi has envisioned various subregions in and around the subcontinent. Re-integrating the subcontinent by re-discovering the old as well as building new land, sea, and riverine corridors has been a key focus. Recent years has seen various connectivity projects in the eastern subcontinent at the bilateral, trilateral and

the subregional BBIN framework intended to achieve the objectives of the new approach and bringing together the Bay of Bengal and the Himalayan subregions.

This bottom-up approach has given India the way forward in building trans-border connectivity and helps it circumvent political challenges.

As India pursues a more robust "Act East" policy, Delhi has been pushing its connectivity projects in two subregional groupings — the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) or the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) to further integrate with Southeast Asia.

The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway project and the sea-river-land Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project that aims to develop transport infrastructure in western Myanmar and Northeastern India forms the key connectivity projects in linking India with that Mekong subregion and have seen notable progress in recent years with greater involvement from Delhi.

As part of the ongoing policy changes and renewed focused on subregional connectivity initiatives, India would need to take some of the subregional connectivity projects and plans beyond mere mentioning

in joint statements. This includes the Delhi-Hanoi Rail Link, the India-Mekong Economic Corridor and the BCIM-Economic Corridor (EC).

Bridging the missing links in and around India will integrate Iran to the west and Vietnam to the east through both land and sea. Better connectivity in India's subregions will support the idea of wider integration between South Asia, Southeast Asia, West Asia, Central Asia, eastern Africa, and the Indian Ocean where Delhi could take the leading role.

Delhi's inability to fully integrate itself with the subregions adversely affects its image-building efforts as a regional power. As India renews its interest to push for subregional connectivity, some of the structural challenges that have long marred effective implementation of strategic infrastructure projects both within as well as in the neighbourhood are being addressed. The challenge for New Delhi is one of sustaining the momentum generated by its subregional initiatives.

(Excerpted from www.orfonline.org on 25 March 2020, authored by Harsh V. Pant and K. Yhome)
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ASEAN's Relations with India, US and Japan under the Shadow of the Chinese Belligerence: Future Prospects and Challenges

India and the South East Asia share a long cultural history, which over the years has helped in shaping economic, social, political and security relations between them. The launch of "Look East Policy" in 1992, which was later rechristened as "Act East" policy in 2015 was a milestone in India's relations with South East Asian nations. It became its Sectoral Dialogue Partner in 1992, a Summit Level Partner in 2002 and its ties were elevated to Strategic partnership in 2012. India has engaged the group both at the regional and bilateral levels. India and ASEAN are having relations at several levels- India-ASEAN Summits, India ASEAN Defence Ministers Meet Plus, India-ASEAN Strategic Dialogue, ARF, EAS Foreign Ministers meeting, EAS, etc. The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation- an initiative of six nations-India and five ASEAN countries, namely, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam- is established for cooperation in tourism, culture, education, as well as transport and communications. At bilateral level with all the nations, arrangements for cooperation exist including for capacity building in security sector.

In view of close relations of India with all ASEAN members particularly with its chair Vietnam, the partnership holds ample potentials for a successful future. There are commonalities in the ASEAN Outlook for Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) indicating coordinated approach for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region based on international norms and laws. The IPOI draws on existing regional cooperation architecture and mechanisms to focus on seven central pillars conceived around Maritime Security; Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport. India's concept is benign and transparent which receives appreciation from ASEAN members. There are significant possibilities for cooperation in the above sectors. India believes in the Security and Growth for all Regions (SAGAR).

Efforts to boost economic relations are being intensified. ASEAN is India's fourth

largest trading partner at US\$ 96.79 billion. Both sides have set the target of US\$ 200 billion by 2022. India is discussing with other countries the formation of the Supply Chains Resilience Initiative (SCRI) to reduce dependence on the Chinese supply line and ensuring less volatility in rates. Nations are getting disenchanted with BRI because it is seen as a debt trap. Alternative for BRI would emerge based on equality and following the best international system for financial assistance. These steps would yield results in the long run.

The need for greater strategic and economic coordination between ASEAN and India cannot be underestimated. Both India and Vietnam as chair of ASEAN would be working in coordination at the UNSC and at the ASEAN platforms and their sustained efforts could succeed in the implementation of international laws and norms in the SCS and establish peace, stability and security in the broader region of Indo-Pacific.

(Excerpted from www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com on 19 September 2020, authored by S.D. Pradhan)
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Moving Forward with Millennia of History

India-Cambodia relations can be traced all the way back to the beginning of the Common Era or perhaps even before, when Hindu and Buddhist religious and cultural influences emanated out of India to Cambodia and the greater Southeast Asia region.

There exists abundance of goodwill for India in Cambodia, which has been sustained by regular interactions between political leaders, the exchange of bilateral visits, aid and assistance, capacity building, cultural exchanges and concessional loans for developmental projects, as well as the restoration and conservation of ancient temples in the Kingdom.

In the context of India's "Act East" policy and ASEAN, Cambodia is an important interlocutor and a good partner. Contemporary times have witnessed the expansion of cooperation in such diverse fields as institutional capacity building, human resources development and the extension of financial assistance in infrastructure projects, social security projects and capacity building in defence.

To promote trade and business

relations, Indian Minister of Commerce and Industry and Civil Aviation Shri Suresh Prabhu visited Cambodia in May 2018 to participate in the India-CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) Business Conclave in Phnom Penh, and held meetings with Prime Minister Hun Sen and Minister of Commerce Pan Sorasak on trade improvement and connectivity.

India and Cambodia have jointly organised events in the Kingdom, such as the 5th India-CLMV Business Conclave and the Incredible India Roadshow in May 2018.

As well as organising events in the Kingdom, a Cambodian government and business delegation were invited to India to participate in the Advantage Assam-India's Expressway to ASEAN in February 2018 and the FICCI Higher Education Summit, Saurashtra Vepar Udyog Maha Mandi (SVUM) in July 2018, as well as other mega events and expos. Moreover, Sorasak led a Cambodian delegation to the 4th India-ASEAN Expo and Summit in New Delhi in March last year. Indian companies investing across multiple sectors in the Kingdom include

Mesco Gold, Bajaj Cambodia and Sram Mram Ltd.

The Indian government has planned to increase Indian economic presence in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. India's trade with the four nations has experienced significant growth over the years, from \$460 million in 2000 to \$4.97 billion in 2004 and \$14.5 billion in 2017.

Currently South Asia's largest trading partner with Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, India is negotiating the India-Cambodia Bilateral Investment Treaty. Cambodia and India have signed agreements on cooperation in the areas such as agriculture, scientific and technological cooperation, entrepreneurship development and tourism. The economic relations between the countries are also facilitated by the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement. With Cambodia and India moving into the future together, they enjoy thousands of years of close history stretching behind them.

(Excerpted from www.phnompenhpost.com on 14 August 2020)

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ASEAN in the Mekong Sub-Regional Integration

At the sub-regional level, ASEAN has continuously created a conducive environment for cooperation and partnership to thrive. In this connection, we must continue to work together to ensure that the existing Mekong sub-regional cooperation frameworks (such as the MRC, GMS, and ACMECS) continue to serve as drivers of growth and prosperity in the region. Moreover, ASEAN should also serve as an important link between sub-regional cooperation mechanisms in the Mekong with other sub-regional frameworks, including BIMP-EAGA and IMS-GT, in order to promote synergy and complementarity among sub-regional initiatives based on the principles of openness, inclusiveness, complementarity and local ownership. In this respect, we must continue to strengthen and streamline the existing mechanisms. We should not give priority to creating new ones.

As far as the Mekong region is concerned, sub-regional cooperation has contributed to the mobilisation of resources

for infrastructure development and the fostering of socio-economic development in the region. Since the 2000s, a number of sub-regional cooperation mechanisms have been created to promote regional integration and connectivity, to narrow development gap among ASEAN Member States contributing to the ASEAN Community building process, and to advance partnership with external partners. For instance, the Mekong-Japan Cooperation was launched in 2007. Over the past two decades, this cooperation framework has contributed to the sub-regional cooperation, sustainable economic growth, and regional connectivity. Numerous projects have been implemented, including the Plan of Actions for the Realization of the 2018 Tokyo Strategy for Mekong-Japan Cooperation, focusing on three new main pillars, namely (1) vibrant and effective connectivity, (2) people-centered society, and (3) the realisation of a Green Mekong.

Speaking of local ownership and the

aspiration of people in the region, I think that ACMECS needs to be the core framework for the Mekong sub-regional development, since it is the cooperation framework created by Mekong countries for peace, stability and prosperity in the Mekong region. Therefore, ACMECS' fundamental principles and its spirit of long-lasting cooperation for peace, stability, and sustainable and inclusive development based on practical cooperation, friendship and mutual interest and understanding should be the core values for the sub-regional cooperation. Indeed, since its inception in 2003, ACMECS has consistently focused on economic cooperation and development, which has strengthened the unity and independence of ACMECS as well as peace, stability and prosperity of the Mekong region.

(Excerpted from www.khmertimeskh.com on 20 July 2020, authored by Cheunboran Chanborey)

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Resources

Building Infrastructure in CLMV: Opportunities for India by Export-Import Bank of India, Occasional Paper No. 202, December 2020



This report focuses on the infrastructure gap in CLMV and the potential opportunities for India. CLMV countries are among the fastest growing countries not only in the ASEAN region, but also globally. Given their level of developments vis-à-vis other ASEAN countries, the CLMV countries need to sustain this high growth pace, supported by infrastructure development, both in terms of new infrastructure and upgradation of existing infrastructure. There is also a great need and opportunity for private investment in infrastructure sector in CLMV. CLMV forms an important sub-region for India. Connectivity became an important issue of convergence between CLMV countries and India, and is a priority for India and CLMV countries. In order to provide a boost to the 'Act East Policy' and to link to Southeast Asian markets, the Indian Government has multiple connectivity projects, through land, water, and air, along with digital connectivity projects.

Mekong-Ganga Policy Brief, Special Issue on 20 Years of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), AIC, RIS, 2020

The special issue of Mekong-Ganga Policy Brief was published to commemorate the twenty years of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation. This special issue is the compendium of articles published in previous issues of Mekong-Ganga Policy Brief since March 2007. It includes articles, speeches and statements issued on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) time to time since 2007.



Social Transformations in India, Myanmar, and Thailand Social, Political and Ecological Perspectives Edited by Chosein Yamahata, Donald M. Seekins, Makiko Takeda, Springer Singapore, 2021

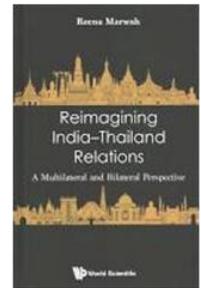
ISBN: 9789811596155
This book focuses on the different challenges and opportunities for social transformation in India, Myanmar and Thailand, by centering communities and individuals as the main drivers of change. In doing so, it includes discussions on a wide array of issues including women's empowerment and political participation, ethno-religious tensions, plurilingualism, education reform, community-based healthcare, climate change, disaster management, ecological systems, and vulnerability reduction. Two core foundations are introduced for ensuring broader transformations. The first is the academic diplomacy project – a framework for an engaged academic enquiry focusing on causative, curative, transformative, and promotive factors. The second is a community driven collective struggle that serves as a grassroots possibility to facilitate positive social transformation by using locally available resources and enabling the participation of the resident population. As a whole, the book conveys the importance of a diversification of engagement at the grassroots level to strengthen the capacity of individuals as decisive stakeholders, where the process of social transformation makes communities more interconnected, interdependent, multicultural and vital in building an inclusive society.



Reimagining India-Thailand Relations: A Multilateral and Bilateral Perspective Reena Marwah, World Scientific Publishing Company, 2020 ISBN: 9789811212055

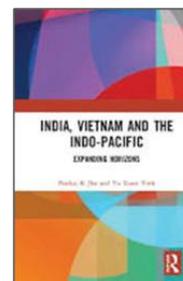
This book brings into focus India's relations with ASEAN and Thailand in particular. The objective of the book is

to contextualise India's relations and influence in Southeast Asia over a period of nearly two thousand years, through culture and religion. The scope of the book extends beyond bilateral issues to include the multilateral, bringing in issues of trade negotiations under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Indo-Pacific construct. Based on interviews conducted with experts, diplomats and scholars in the field, this book encompasses a wide range of aspects that pertain to the historical, cultural, economic and strategic international relations of ASEAN and Thailand with India.



India, Vietnam and the Indo-Pacific: Expanding Horizons Pankaj K Jha, Vo Xuan Vinh, Taylor & Francis, 2020 ISBN:9781000067347

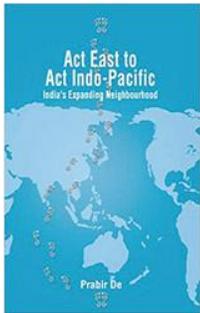
This book delves into the examination of bilateral relations between India and Vietnam in the 21st century and how the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical construct lends itself to the improvement of their engagement. With the rise and increasing assertiveness of China, the slow growth of the United States, the resurgence of Japan, and the oscillating role of ASEAN as a multilateral organization, the Indo-Pacific has emerged as a theatre of international geostrategic competition. This book studies these changing geopolitical realities and new evolving strategic configurations, while addressing political, economic, defence, and strategic aspects of the relationship along with the role of China and the US in facilitating ties. India's Act East Policy that was upgraded from the Look East Policy – one of the main drivers for India's increasing presence in the Asia-Pacific region – is also examined in this volume.



Resources

Act East to Act Indo-Pacific: India's Expanding Neighbourhood

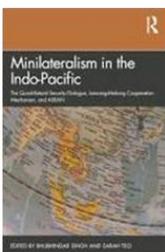
Prabir De,
KW Publishers Pvt Limited, 2020
ISBN: 9789389137309



This book presents short essays written by the author on several key aspects of India's economic relations and the challenges faced by India in the post-AEP period. Ten broad themes are analysed in this book: BBIN, BIMSTEC, SAARC, ASEAN, MGC, Act East-North East, BCIM, BRI, Act Far East and Indo-Pacific. This volume highlights what, in author's best judgement, should be the direction for India's expanding neighbourhood. It is an economist's insight and field experience based analysis that offers guidelines for international cooperation. This volume is an invaluable companion for the policymakers, academia, students of international relations, diplomats and the general readership as well.

Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific: The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism, and ASEAN

Sarah Teo, Taylor & Francis, 2020
ISBN: 9781000060027



Both China and the US have contributed to minilateral initiatives in the Indo-Pacific. In the case of the former, there is the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation mechanism-involving China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam-established in 2015. In the case of the latter, there has been a revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in 2017—involving the US, Australia, Japan and India. This book examines the rise of

these arrangements, their challenges and opportunities, as well as their impact on the extant regional security architecture, including on the ASEAN-led multilateral order. A valuable guide for students and policy-makers looking to understand the nature and development of minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific region.

COVID-19 Challenges for the Indian Economy: Trade and Foreign Policy Effects

Countries across the world are facing serious consequences and damages to the economies. Although India has managed well in containing the spread of the Coronavirus, the COVID-19 pandemic has already disrupted normal economic activity and life in the country. India's trade has been severely impacted. Businesses are very vulnerable to the unfolding economic crisis. People have been facing a sudden loss in their incomes, causing a major drop in demand. To rescue the economy, India has announced a range of fiscal and monetary stimulus packages. This pandemic has strong foreign and trade policy effects, and motivated us to engage in compiling this Report. This Report presents freshly written 40 important commentaries by senior research scholars, professors, economists and practitioners on trade and foreign policy challenges posed by this crisis and the way forward.

Rights and Security in India, Myanmar, and Thailand

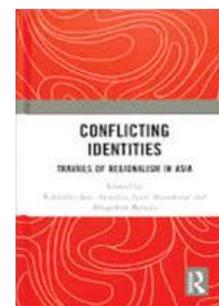
Edited by Chosein Yamahata, Suedo, Takashi Matsugi,
Springer Singapore, 2020

This book is centred on the role of the triangular interactions among communities, educational sectors,

and academic diplomacy in facilitating peaceful societal change by evaluating the common challenges in India, Myanmar, and Thailand. It analyses urban poverty, religious freedom, ethnic diversity, women's rights, development and regional partnership, civil-military relations, and human security in democratic transition and explores in-depth the societal issues from local and international perspectives paying special attention to the protection of 'rights' and promotion of 'security' in these societies. The book highlights that the continuous application of knowledge across borders and the promotion of international norms are essential tools in enabling social transformations from the bottom. In addition, the contributors promote further discussion on both the process and the outcome from action research projects that shape the lives of the local people and their communities. The book therefore contributes to the existing literature by offering additional insights into the societies of India, Myanmar and Thailand for policy makers, social innovators, researchers, development analysts and planners and the general public including students.

Conflicting Identities: Travails of Regionalism in Asia

Edited by Anindya Jyoti Majumdar,
Bhagaban Behera and Rabindra Sen,
Taylor & Francis, 2019
ISBN: 9781000651546



This volume is the culmination of the brainstorming exercise of a National Seminar on 'Asian Regionalism in the Twenty First Century' at the Department of International



Resources

Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. The task is to fulfil two main objectives: to join the debate on the efficacy of regionalism today and make a meaningful contribution to an understanding of the subject; and also, to suggest ways of tiding over the problems faced by the countries in various regions or sub-regions of the Asian continent in their attempts to advance towards the goal of regional cooperation and integration. The essays in this book are envisioned to benefit not only a wide community of scholars involved in teaching and research in general and the students of international relations in particular but would also be of interest to any avid reader who intends to explore the patterns of contemporary world politics.

ACMECS – MGC Linkages and India as Development Partner: Potential Areas of Cooperation **Prabir De, Durairaj Kumarasamy and Sreya Pan, AIC Working Paper, No. 1, January 2020**



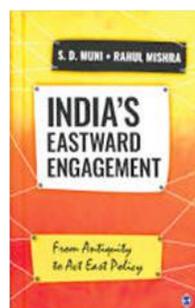
The Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), initiated by Thailand in 2003, is a cooperation framework among the five countries in the Mekong subregion, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. ACMECS has been working as a subregional forum to facilitate economic cooperation among the member countries. India has strong civilisational and cultural linkages with ACMECS countries. Under the overarching theme of connectivity, the focus of ACMECS has been on development of border zones, smart and sustainable development and synchronised economy. To further strengthen the ACMECS, Thailand has invited India as a development partner. India has been actively engaged with ACMECS under the Act East Policy (AEP) through Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

(MGC), which was launched in 2000 and initiated several projects. MGC has been celebrating 20 years of its establishment in 2020. In popular term, MGC = India + ACMECS. There are similarities and synergies between MGC and ACMECS. India's activities as a development partner would further deepen the India-ACMECS relationship as well as MGC. This paper investigates the linkages between ACMECS and MGC, identifies the complementarities between ACMECS and MGC Plan of Actions (POA) and discusses the potential areas of cooperation

India's Eastward Engagement: From Antiquity to Act East Policy

S.D. Muni and Rahul Mishra, SAGE Publications, 2019

ISBN: 9789353282691



The book presents India's engagement with its extended eastern neighbours from ancient times to the present. It argues that this engagement has been long rooted in India's geographical location, its civilizational evolution and historical transformations. The book critically examines all the important phases—Nehru and Post-Nehru periods, and Look East and Act East policies. It exposes the widely entertained myths about India's eastward engagement and also underlines the prospective directions in which the Act East Policy may unfold in the years to come

Northeast India and India's Act East Policy: Identifying the Priorities

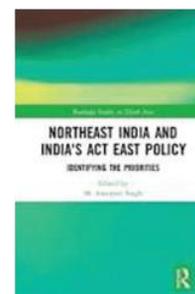
Edited by M. Amarjeet Singh, Taylor & Francis, 2019

ISBN: 9781000124187

This book offers an understanding of

the expectations and challenges of Northeast India in the context of India's Act East policy. It critically examines how the policy is being pursued by the present central government and analyses its relevance from local perspectives.

Contributors to the book provide an examination of the differences between Look East and Act East policy and explanations of the expectations of India's neighboring countries, particularly Myanmar, towards Northeast India. The first book to combine a balanced view of India's Act East policy and Northeast India, it will be of interest to policy makers and academics in the fields of Development Studies, International Relations, Northeast India and South Asian Politics.



The Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism Enterprises in the Lao People's Democratic Republic: An Initial Assessment **ADB, June 2020**



ADB conducted surveys of tourism enterprises in four of the Lao PDR's major tourism destinations in August 2019 and May 2020. Results indicate that in May 2020 about half of the

surveyed enterprises were temporarily closed. About 70% of the surveyed enterprises had reduced employees, with employee numbers falling by 38%. The negative impact was larger among enterprises that target international guests than among those that primarily serve domestic guests. Promotion of domestic tourism could be a key part of the Lao PDR's COVID-19 recovery plan.

Statistical Indicators

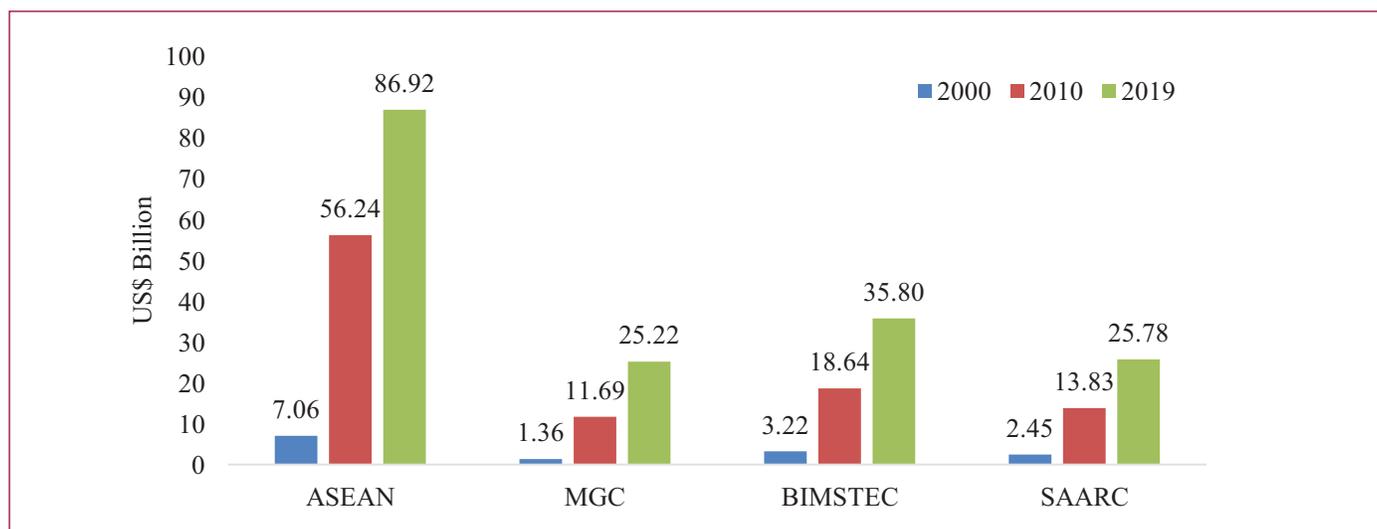
Socio and Macro Indicators of MGC Countries, 2019

Indicator	India	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Myanmar	Thailand	Vietnam
Population, total (million)	1366.42	16.49	7.17	54.05	69.63	96.46
GDP (current billion US\$)	2875.14	27.09	18.17	76.09	543.65	261.92
GDP per capita (current US\$)	2104.15	1643.12	2534.90	1407.81	7808.19	2715.28
GDP (PPP current billion \$)	9611.68	75.35	58.44	289.43	1338.78	807.82
Agriculture and allied, value added (% of GDP)	15.96	20.71	15.29	21.35*	8.00	13.96
Industry, value added (% of GDP)	24.88	34.23	30.91	37.96*	33.40	34.49
Services, etc., value added (% of GDP)	49.88	38.85	42.65	40.69*	58.59	41.64
Trade (% of GDP)	40.02	123.56		60.69*	110.30	210.40
GDP Growth Rate (%), (2000-2019) (CAGR)	10.02	11.08	13.17	11.95	7.98	11.85
Gross capital formation (% of GDP)	30.21	24.23		30.64*	23.95	26.84
Gross domestic savings (% of GDP)	27.99	25.78		29.59*	33.82	25.38
Inflation, consumer prices (annual %)	7.66	2.46*	3.32	8.83	0.71	2.80

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

Note: * indicates values are from 2018

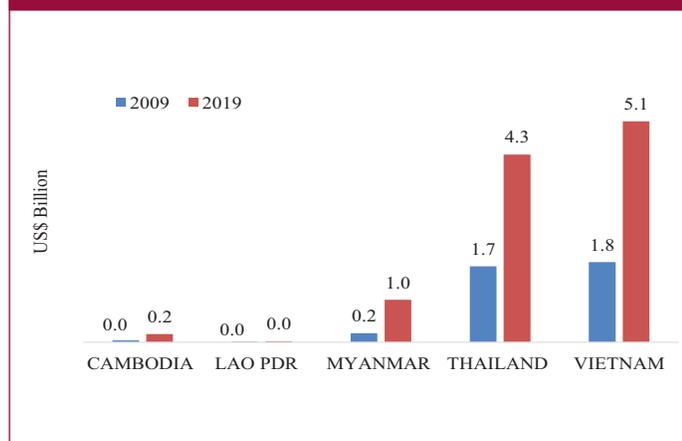
India's Total Trade with Regional Blocks



Source: Export Import Data Bank, Government of India.

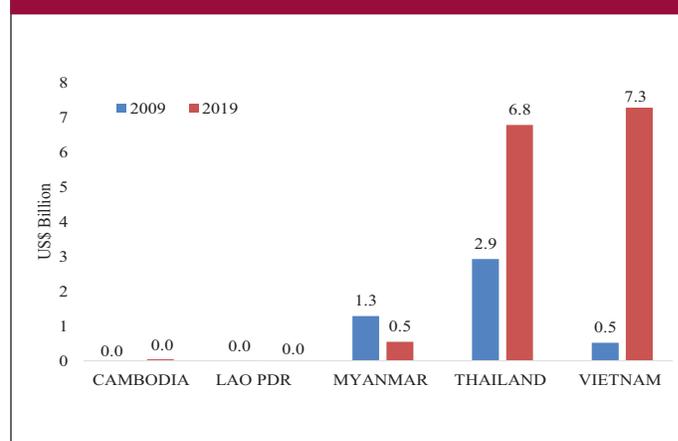
Statistical Indicators

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 Engagement in MGC in Response to Covid-19

India has reaffirmed the country's commitment to the neighbouring countries under the 'Neighbouring First' Policy, to enhance cooperation and mutual support to control and contain the spread of the virus. India outreaches the Southeast Asia, South Asia and Island nations (Maldives, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros and Seychelles) via video conferencing and has provided medical assistance, essential medicines and food items. India has extended its assistance eastwards to reinforce the Act East Policy (AEP). Indian Prime Minister had video conferencing with several

leaders of the MGC member states on a potential regional and bilateral response to the Covid-19 pandemic (Table 1).

India has launched 'Vande Bharat Mission' in three extended phases of major exercise to repatriate Indian citizens across the world. Through this mission, India has repatriated thousands of Indian citizens from MGC countries and also extended help to MGC countries to bring back their citizens from India, for instance, India has sent 3 flights to Thailand, 2 flights to Viet Nam and one flight each to Myanmar and Cambodia respectively.

India is working with ASEAN partners in supplying pharmaceutical products, exchange of experts and sharing of information in the field of public health. For instance, India has supplied masks, sanitizers, and medicines and medical equipment to the Myanmar, Cambodia and Thailand.

ASEAN and India may initiate a Joint Statement or a Declaration on India-ASEAN COVID-19 Response to reaffirm the commitments to enhance their strategic cooperation and mutual

...Continued on page 28

Table 1: India's Engagement in MGC in Response to Covid-19

	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Myanmar	Thailand	Viet Nam
Head to Head - Telephonic / Video Conferencing	√	√	√	√	√
Repatriation of stranded (Vande Bharat Mission)	√		√	√	√
Sharing information and exchange of experts			√	√	√
Distribution of Medical and Pharmaceutical supplies	√		√	√	√

Note: As on 21 June 2020. Empty cell presents data/information not available.

Source: Authors' own based on several secondary sources

India's Engagement in MGC in Response to Covid-19

support to stop the spread of COVID-19 and strengthen joint efforts toward post-pandemic recovery. Recently, ASEAN and India at the 20th ASEAN-India Joint Cooperation Committee (AIJCC) Meeting, held via video-conferencing on 11 June 2020, reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthen and deepen their cooperation. At this meeting, both parties also shared

their commitment to complete the development of the new Plan of Action for 2021-2025 to further strengthen their strategic partnership over the next five years.

Both ASEAN and India have agreed to enhance the cooperation in the areas of health emergency and medicine, transnational crime, trade and investment, environment, education,

sustainable development, energy, smart cities, connectivity, people-to-people contacts as well as narrowing the development gap in ASEAN.

(Excerpted from De, Prabir; Kumarasamy, Durairaj and Pan, Sreya (2020) "ASEAN-India Response to COVID-19: A Silver Lining Amidst the Health Crisis", AIC Commentary, No.6, June.)

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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