

## Missing Links and India-ASEAN Connectivity

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### Abstract:

In view of the previous research, the present study goes for an in-depth review of missing links of India-ASEAN connectivity. India-ASEAN took important steps to develop their connectivity through means of Land Transport, Air Transport and Sea Transport. To have a comprehensive understanding of the area, first it is essential to introduce Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East-Asia (ERIA) and its origin. ERIA drafted a comprehensive Asia Development Plan (CADP) to support the establishment of an integrated economic region through both soft and hard infrastructure development, engendering a competitive and globally connected East Asia, which would be at the heart of the world's growth center.

**Key words:** India, ASEAN, Connectivity, Missing, Links.

### Introduction:

The last decade has witnessed significant changes in the relationship between India and ASEAN and more particularly in connectivity areas. ERIA has drafted a comprehensive Development Plan Phase second, which focuses on India-ASEAN connectivity. The economic impacts of the Golden Quadrilateral (GQ) and North-South and East-West Highways (NSEW) of India should be highlighted since some regions get economic advantages from these highway projects while others are negatively impacted. With the development of GQ and NSEW, economic activities along these economic corridors are revitalized, leading to a higher GRDP. In principle, domestic connectivity enhancement benefits the Indian economy. In addition to domestic connectivity enhancement, India will have additional benefits of India-ASEAN connectivity. Our geographical Simulation Model showed that the Mekong-India Economic Corridor (MIEC), the Trilateral Highway and other India-ASEAN connectivity projects as well as market liberalization would bring additional positive impacts for India and Mekong-region.

In this regard, ERIA is supporting the Myanmar government with longer development vision through the Myanmar Comprehensive Development Vision (MCDV) project. In this said project, India focuses some of the emerging and essential routes of India's connectivity with ASEAN including the "Trilateral Highway", Bangkok is connected with India's Northeastern states by means of Myanmar. As a road infrastructure in Thailand is well developed, the remaining issues are the sections in Myanmar and the Parts of Northeastern states. Moreover, trade and transport facilitation across the

two national borders between Thailand and Myanmar and Myanmar and India needs to be address with a promise of commitment from all the involved countries. With growing trade and investment linkages, the Mekong India Economic Corridor (MIEC) shall provide opportunities to Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and India to build a strong economic and industrial base and an excellent infrastructure. The emphasis of the corridor is on expanding the manufacturing base and to expand trade with the rest of the world, particularly India. The corridor will enable these economies to further integrate with each other and collectively emerge as a globally competitive economic bloc.

MIEC is expected to enhance trade with India by reducing travel distance between India and MIEC countries and removing supply side bottlenecks. In order to optimize the development of the corridor, MIEC includes all key economic centers and seaport locations along their western coasts. However, there remain significant missing links in this corridor. In addition, the connectivity between the countries of MIEC should enhance through up gradation of the road infrastructure “Physical Connectivity” and several trade and transport facilitation measures “Institutional Connectivity”.

Now Myanmar is on its way to all-round reform. Current economic and economic reform in Myanmar and Thilawa development will benefit Myanmar by taking economic agglomeration to Yangon and Dawei project shall have a huge economic impact on the Mekong region and is beneficial for Northeast Indian region. Moreover, equitable development of Myanmar is all-important for the sustainable economic growth of the country and the region. In the MCDV project, ERIA has posted a Two-Polar (Yangon and Mandalay) development, connectivity and enhancement in the domestic economic corridors and border development. This strategic combination will achieve both high economic growth and equitable development and bring additional benefits to India and the Mekong region.

### **India-ASEAN Connectivity projects and Missing Links:**

Attempts are being made to establish better connectivity infrastructure with this region through land, air and sea. For this initiative, India announced a line of credit of US\$ one billion to promote project that support physical and digital connectivity between India and ASEAN and a project development fund with corpus INR 500 crore to develop manufacturing hubs in CLMV at the 13<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-India summit held in Myanmar in 2015. The India-ASEAN connectivity Report by RIS (Research and Information System for Developing Countries) advocates the enhancement of connectivity between India and ASEAN with an emphasis on two major axes. Land connectivity with the Northeastern region and air, and sea connectivity with the southern region, with a thrust on the Chennai-Ennore area.

### **Land Transport:**

The India-ASEAN partnership depends upon effective transportation links. The most important of the proposed linkage involve land transport. In particular, the road network offers a number of challenges: poor quality of road networks, including missing links, highway lanes, lighting system and quality of roads differ across in Asia, and there is a lot of work to be done in standardization of highway construction. With a long international border and landlocked position, accompanied by a hilly terrain, across the Northeastern region has been a challenge. Development of roads and railway

networks to connect this region to ASEAN partners will provide an avenue for cross-border trade while simultaneously expediting economic development in this region.

Completion of ASEAN highway network, including the trilateral highway connecting Thailand, Myanmar and India has been adopted as one of the priorities of the Master Plan on ASEAN connectivity. The project was expected to be completed by the end of 2016. During the year 2012, Dr. Manmohan Singh the then Prime Minister of India proposed that a second track of the trilateral highway be launched to connect India with Myanmar, Lao, Cambodia and Vietnam.

The completion of national road projects such as Chennai-Ennore Port Road Connectivity Project, the national Highway Development Programme and Dedicated freight Corridor projects to improve national connectivity is essential to allow smooth flow of goods and services. Rail can play a positive and important role in integrating India with ASEAN, which will promote bulk transnational movement amongst the neighbouring countries needs are twofold: one to link India's Manipur with India's main railway corridor, and second to establish and renovate railway networks in Myanmar. Harmonization of railway track in the said region is very important. Without having a compatible and strong railways system inside Myanmar and Bangladesh, closer communication between India and its immediate neighbours will be unfulfilled.

There is a plan to establish a rail link from Kolkata to Ho Chi Minh City via Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, but this project is more a wish list than a reality on planning and design. The investment required is likely to be substantial, and it is not clear whether international traffic alone will provide adequate returns for this investment. Further, there is a question whether such a route would pass through Bangladesh or use the existing Indian railways network.

### **Air Transport:**

Air transport is another important mode of transportation for high value frangible goods, perishable commodities and passengers the trade in the goods are expected to grow significantly. The passenger flow will also multiply as the tourism potential of corridor is enhanced and new sites are developed. There is considerable interest in ASEAN countries for tourism in the Northeast part of India, and considerable travel by citizens of these states to the rest of the Asia. The 14<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Transport Ministers meeting held in Makati, Metro, and Melina, Philippines in 2008 upheld the proposed open skies Agreement and India's keen interest to join the ASEAN member nations in an Open Skies Regime, covering airfreight and passenger services.

Collaboration with Singapore and Malaysia to improve airport infrastructure may be explored by India and other ASEAN nations. Air transport network is expected to be enhanced by the ongoing initiatives to establish the ASEAN Single Aviation Market (ASAM) and the ASEAN's air transport agreement with its Dialogue Partners including India, China and Korea. The implementation of the Single Aviation Market likely to permit integrated trade agreements. After the formation of India's "Act East Policy" in November 2014. The policy emphasized on three C's that is Commerce, Culture and Connectivity are the focus areas of action for a greater India-ASEAN integration. It takes an account the blueprint of the three pillars of ASEAN vision document, ASEAN community building process, ASEAN 2025-foregoing ahead together, the ASEAN Master Plan for Connectivity 2025 and the ASEAN integration work plan III.

### **Sea Transport:**

Port network and seas transportation will be the main trade link of ASEAN region, particularly for bulk transport. However, many ASEAN countries (except Singapore and Malaysia) rank poorly in the UNCTAD Liner shipping connectivity index. Capacity utilization at most gateway ports in the region is high, indicating that investment in port expansion is required. Current port capacity will have to be increased in present times particularly in India and the Mekong region, in order to meet the expected increase in demand for port services. A JICA study on 47 designated ports in ASEAN revealed a number of challenges in providing shipping that is more efficient shipping network services given the varying levels of port infrastructure development. There is a significant mismatch in the port facilities offered in different countries; these infrastructure gaps create difficulties for port users. Operational efficiency of Indian ports needs to be enhanced significantly to bring them at par with international ports. The construction of new ports in different places is in pipeline and the expansion of existing ports such as Yangon, Sittwe and Chennai, are expected. Indeed waterways along Kaladan River and Ganga also enhance the connectivity between mainland and Northeastern part of India through Myanmar and Bangladesh respectively.

In year April 2008, India and Myanmar signed the agreement for Kaladan Multi-Model Transit Transport Project, finally by India's Ministry for External Affairs. The project connected the port of Kolkata with the Sittwe port in Myanmar. It then link Sittwe to Mizoram through river and road transport project. The project was scheduled for completion by year 2014. India kicked off the construction of 109 Km road project that connects Palewta river terminal to Zirinpui on the border in Myanmar as part of the US\$484 million Kaladan Multi-Model Transit Transport Project India has already completed the rest of Kaladan project in Myanmar. This includes the construction of the Sittwe Port on Lakadan river mouth in Rakhine, construction of river terminal 158 upstream at palewa and dredging of the Kaladan River.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, connectivity is the key to enhancing the strengths of ASEAN and India by joining the production of networks. A combination of physical and institutional connectivity is critical. Moreover, connectivity is required to achieve both the Deepening of economic integration and narrowing the developmental gaps. The key to making all this happen is not just physical connectivity. Physical connectivity should be developed in conjunction with institutional connectivity, in the form of institutional arrangements to facilitate cross-border movement of goods and services. At the same time, there are several missing links in connectivity in Indian-ASEAN relations and some challenges of physical connectivity like absence of harmonization of railway networks, lack of standardization of all weather-paved roads, inefficient and under developed border and inadequate security and many more.

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