



## Connectivity Projects: India and Southeast Asia

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### Why in News

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Recently, at the virtual **ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) summit on Future of India-ASEAN Connectivity Partnerships**, the Indian government underlined the importance of cross-border connectivity between India and Southeast Asian nations.

**ASEAN** brings together **ten Southeast Asian states** – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – into one organisation.

### Key Points

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- **Connectivity between India and Southeast Asia:**
  - India currently is working with ASEAN on multiple connectivity projects, **through land, water, and air.**
  - Giving substance to ASEAN-India relations through connectivity will **gradually change the geopolitical landscape of this region.**
  - In this context, India has now been **actively developing infrastructure in Northeastern India.**
    - **Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Corridor** is part of this.
  - These connectivity projects **will not only curb existing insurgencies**, but also help India's northeastern states to develop their economic potential and integrate with mainland India.
  - Further, **India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** is central to India's growing engagement with her eastern neighbours.
    - It will enable small and medium-sized enterprises in the border areas to explore new business opportunities.

- **Examples of Cross Connectivity Projects:**

- **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway:**

- One of the flagship projects for **land connectivity** between ASEAN and India.
- Connecting the three countries from **Moreh in India to Mae Sot in Thailand to Bagan in Myanmar**, was first proposed in 2002.
- Besides this, the **India, Myanmar, and Thailand Motor Vehicles Agreement (IMT MVA)** is in the final stage.

On realization, this will become the **first-ever cross border facilitation agreement between South and Southeast Asia.**



○ **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP):**

- To develop connectivity **through water**, ASEAN and India are working on **KMMTTP**.
- Initiated by the Indian government in 2008 and is entirely funded by India.
- To seek an **alternative route through Myanmar for the transportation of goods to the northeast region of India**.
- Connects **Kolkata in India to Sittwe and Paletwa in Myanmar** by sea and river respectively.
- Alongside this initiative, India has contributed to build a sea link via Sittwe port in Myanmar in order to enable an **alternative transit route through Bangladesh**.



○ **Mekong-India Economic Corridor (MIEC):**

- Involves the integration of **four Mekong countries – Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia - along with India**, connecting Ho Chi Minh City, Dawei, Bangkok, and Phnom Penh with Chennai.
- The corridor will provide opportunities for the participant countries to develop infrastructure, enhance their economic base with the region, and especially reduce the transit distance between India and ASEAN countries.



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## Way Forward

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- **Extension of Trilateral Highway:** The Trilateral Highway can be extended to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. This will enable greater connectivity and economic integration of India's northeast with its eastern neighbours.
- **Digital Highway:** As such beyond movement of goods and physical connectivity, it is also important for two regions to explore ways to enhance digital connectivity.  
This is in concurrence with the Government of India efforts to turn India into a Global Data Hub.
- **Improving Maritime Connectivity:** With the introduction of the **“Sagarmala” project**, India plans to invest in port infrastructure for improved integration and connectivity through the sea. This is an encouraging step towards enhancing India-ASEAN Connectivity projects.

**Source: PIB**