

**MEKONG-GANGA PROJECT: A STUDY OF SUB- REGIONAL  
COOPERATION**

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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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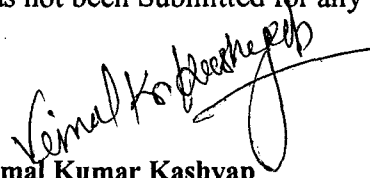
(2011)



**DECLARATION**

Date: 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2011

I declare that the dissertation entitled “**MEKONG-GANGA PROJECT: A STUDY OF SUB-REGIONAL COOPERATION**” submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been Submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

  
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**CERTIFICATE**


We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



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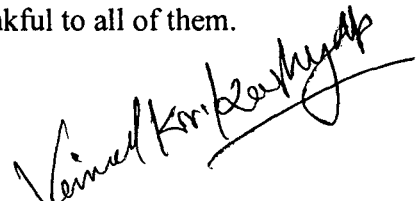


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## **Preface**

The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation is aimed at promoting the connectivity for cooperation between India and mainland Southeast Asia and it also has put in to focus India's relation with CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) in the limelight. I have studied Mekong-Ganga Cooperation its genesis and achievements in five chapters.

The first chapter deals with the introduction of the Mekong-Ganaga Cooperation, which is one of the finest examples of sub-regional cooperation.

The chapters two provide a comprehensive analysis of the structures, various bodies, policies and references to the various meetings of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation. This chapter is also providing a valuable insight on the success and the failure of the Mekong-Ganga cooperation and also a comparative study of Greater Mekong Cooperation (GMC).

The chapter three attempts to find the correlation and the connectivity among the other existing framework in the region, connecting both the sub-region. In this regard, this chapter attempts to search the connection with BIMSTEC, which was the first to connect both the regions.

Chapter four deals with the matrix of the multilateral framework in the entire East Asia, ASEAN remained a central regional organization. It is the engine of all multilateral wagons. This chapter attempts to search the correlation between the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and ASEAN as complementing each other and accelerating cooperation.

Chapter five is the concluding chapters where it is also test the hypothesis and assumptions have been tested

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## **ABBREVIATION**

ACD	ASEAN COOPERATION DAIALOGE
ADB	ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK
APEC	ASIA PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION
AMM	ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING
APT	ASEAN +3
ATF	ASEAN TOURISM FOURAM
BIMSTEC	BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE OF MULTISECTORAL TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERTION
CLMV	COMBODIA, LAOS, MYANMAR, VIETNAM
CII	CONFEDERATION OF INDIAN INDUSTRY
CUTS	CONSUMER UNITY AND TRUST SOCIETY
EAEA	EAST ASIAN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION
ECSC	EUROPEAN COAL AND STEAL COMPANY
FDI	FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT
FTA	FREE TRADE AREA
GMC	GREATER MEKONG COOPERATION
JWG	JOINT WORKING GROUP
LDC	LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

LEP	LOOK EAST POLICY
ULFA	UNITED LIBERATION FRONT OF ASAM
NAM	NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT
NER	NORTH EAST REGION
UNDP	UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
UNSC	UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

## CHAPTER: I

### Introduction

Regionalism today has become one of the prominent defining features of modern international relations. Many countries constantly follow it across the globe and individually adopt various kinds of grouping to enhance their capabilities. It is quite difficult to explain exactly when the concept of regionalism came into being, but it has basically acquired form and shape after 1950, with the formation of European Coal and Steel Community<sup>1</sup> in 1953. The European Union later became its full-fledged and most integrated regional organization; it is also called as a supranational organization<sup>2</sup>. Regionalism has spread across the world through multilateral frameworks dealing with issues of economics, security etc. The Asia-Pacific region is home to several regional groupings that have integrated the region within itself and also with other powers.

### Conceptualizing Regionalism

Regionalism is not a new phenomenon to the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; it has become an important concept that is rapidly becoming widespread. Today, regionalism functions according to the regional, social, economical and cultural realities as well as a demanding vision in every continent. On the other hand, "Regionalization" is the process of describing the deepening of regional thinking, behavior and it is more sociological concept rather than political. Regionalization can be conceived as the growth of societal integration within a given region, but regionalism primarily focuses in economic dimensions of regional cooperation<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was a six-nation international organization serving to unify Western Europe during the Cold War and create the foundation for the modern-day developments of the European Union.

<sup>2</sup> Supranationalism is a method of decision-making in multi-national political communities, wherein power is transferred or delegated to an authority by governments of member states. The concept of supranational union is sometimes used to describe the European Union, as a new type of political entity.

<sup>3</sup> Kacowicz, Arie M. (1998) Regionalization, Globalization and Nationalism: Convergent, Divergent, or Overlapping? Jerusalem, IPSA Study group, p11



According to Benedict Anderson, a region is a spatial concept, which is described as “Imagined Communities”<sup>4</sup>. It is defined by a combination of:

- Geographical proximity
- Density of interactions
- Shared institutional frameworks
- Common cultural identities
- Trade flows
- Similarities of actor attributes, and shared values and experiences.

Regionalism is the result of increasing flow of goods, people, and ideas within a spatial entity, and becomes more integrated and cohesive<sup>5</sup>. Mental or psychological aspects are also an important factor to construct an image of a region, especially when we construct an image in our mind of non-geographical regions like Nordic or Transatlantic. The ultimate outcome of regionalism is integration<sup>6</sup>. Some of the important features of regionalism are as follows.

- I. **Free Trade Area or Agreement FTA.** The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) involves mutual removal of all tariffs, quota and other trade restrictions between the member states and retains the ability to formulate its own trade policy towards non-members.
- II. **Custom Unions:** This stage extends FTA arrangements to include the adoption of common external tariffs upon non-members imports entering the custom union.
- III. **Common or internal markets:** This extends a custom union to involve the elimination of barriers that impede free movement of goods, services, people and capital.
- IV. **Economic and Monetary Union:** It extends common or internal markets among its members by adopting a common currency. Monetary union requests its

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<sup>4</sup> An imagined community is different from an actual community because it is not based on everyday face-to-face interaction between its members. Instead, members hold in their minds a mental image of their affinity for example, the nationhood you feel with other members of your nation when your "imagined community" participates in a larger event such as the Olympics.

<sup>5</sup> Dent, Christopher (2008), East Asian regionalism, New York, Taylor & Francis, p 21

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

members to collaborate more closely on a variety of economic policies e.g. fiscal, social and industrial policies that is why with monetary union the spillovers from one domain into others become more extensive e.g. monetary and tax policy.

- V. **Economic and Political Union:** It is an ultimate stage of regional integration. Members embrace federal union essentially for unified state. The United States of America and Germany were the important historical examples that unified all the federal states. In the recent time the European Union has emerged as one of the most integrated regional organization.

Against the backdrop of European regionalism, scholars labeled that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as the most successful regional organization in Asia. Compared with other regional groupings, like the League of Arab Nations, the African Union or SAARC, where economic, political, security or technical cooperation is limited; ASEAN looks indeed mature and effective. Since its establishment in 1967, ASEAN's cooperation and integration process has also been regarded as a momentous achievement. Its integration endeavors has gained both depth and vision only as recently as in the 1990s. ASEAN has played a constructive role and as the hub in a less institutionalized network that interlinks between East Asia and Southeast Asia.

ASEAN has contributed to the process of regionalism in the fields of economics, trade and security in the Southeast Asian region through the groupings like ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), the Asia Pacific Economic cooperation (APEC), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) or ASEAN + 3 (APT)<sup>7</sup>. All these institutions work under the idea of "ASEAN way", equality, sovereignty, non-interference, consensual decision-making and voluntarism.

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<sup>7</sup> From the late 1980s onwards, only a mere dozen political scientists and economists, mainly from the universities in Vienna and Innsbruck, have written their Master or doctoral thesis on East or Southeast Asian issues

**Map No. 1:** The map of the Regional Multilateral framework around the world



### **Development of Multilateralism among the Sub-region**

Southeast Asia is one of the most diverse regions in the world in terms of culture, ethnicity, politics as well as economy. It was the center of congruence of international actors after the Second World War. Withdrawal of the two super powers from the region and simultaneous rise of China in the region made it the center of attention once again<sup>8</sup>. New industrializing economies of Southeast Asian countries achieved sustained levels of economic growth based on strategies of export led growth<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, all the Southeast Asian countries engaged in multilateral efforts to promote the free trade and strove for expanding trade and commerce at different levels. Japan, China and United States continue to play a vital and important role in economic, political and security roles in the

<sup>8</sup>Donald E. Weatherbee, Ralf Emmers (2005) International relations in Southeast Asia: the struggle for autonomy, New York, Rowman and Life field publishers

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

dynamics of international relations in the Southeast Asia<sup>10</sup>. The script is constantly changing and some other actors like India, Korea, Australia and New Zealand are also playing an important and constructive role in the regional security and economical scenario<sup>11</sup>.

In the backdrop, India is becoming a significant actor in the development of sub-regionalism. Civilization and cultural linkages between India and Southeast Asia can be traced back to the early historical period. The ancient Indian epics such as the Ramayana, refers to some parts of Southeast Asia, and influenced the development of kingdoms and empires like Srivijaya in Sumatra and the Majapahit in Java, Bali and the Philippine archipelago. India initially was a champion of decolonization in Southeast Asia during the 1950s and 1960s as head of the Nonaligned Movement (NAM), the 1970s saw India drifting into the Soviet orbit.

**Table No. 1:** The economic capability of the Southeast Asia region

Selected basic ASEAN indicators		ASEANstates		
As of 15 February 2011				
Indicators	Units	2008	2009	2010
Land area	Km2	4,435,83	4,435,67	NA
Population	Thousand	583,673	590,844	NA
GDP	US\$ mil.	1,512,707	1,496,341	NA
GDP growth	Percentage	4.4	1.5	NA
Per capita	US\$	2592	2533	NA
International merchandise trade	US\$	1,897,127	1,536,84	NA
Export	US\$	977,537	810,489	810,489.2
Import	US\$	919,591	726,354	NA
FDI	US\$	49,469	39,387	36,113.
Visitor arrivals	Thousand	65,605	65,808	NA

Sources: ASEANstats 2011, ASEAN Secretariat

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

India and ASEAN thus found themselves advocating different economic strategies and supporting distinct political ideologies. India also twice refused (in 1975 and in 1980) to engage in dialogue with ASEAN countries, labeling them allies of the “imperialist West”. After independence, India looked forward to carving a new role for herself in the Asian continent. Southeast Asia attracted India’s attention and demanded its active involvement. Prime Minister Nehru’s vision of a resurgent Asia and India’s crucial engagement in reshaping its destiny was based on three assumptions, each of which foreshadowed its orientation in contemporary policies. First, Nehru asserted India’s geo-strategic centrality to Asia as it was situated at the meeting point of western, northern, and eastern and southeastern Asia. Secondly, its historical and cultural roots were deeply embedded into the larger evolution of Asia over the centuries. Thirdly, Nehru believed that the decolonized and newly independent countries of Asia would like to keep away from great power rivalries and conflict and also free themselves from the economic and political bondages of their respective ‘metropolis’<sup>12</sup>,

The establishment of ASEAN in 1967 and Southeast Asia’s vigor to promote regionalization were however, incompatible with India’s inward looking orientation. Moreover, India’s successful intervention in the Bangladesh crisis was regarded as an uncalled for interference in Pakistan’s affairs by ASEAN nations. India’s close ties with the Soviet Union perturbed the ASEAN nations, as did her warm relationship with Vietnam.<sup>13</sup>

After the disintegration of Soviet Union, scholars have opined that three factors shaped India’s overall policy in Asia during this time namely:

- With the forces of globalization gaining momentum, India’s larger economic considerations facilitated regional cooperation.

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<sup>12</sup> Muni, S. D. (2004) “Emerging Asia; India’s Options”, New Delhi, *International Studies*, Volume 31, Number 4, Sage Publications. P. 319.

<sup>13</sup> Sridharan, kripa (2001) “ *The ASEAN Region in India’s ‘Look East’ Policy*” in *India and ASEAN; Foreign Policy Dimensions For the 21st Century*, New Centuries Publications 2005, Part I Chapter 7, p 118.

- Maintaining political stability in the neighborhood was desirable for the overall preservation of democracy, pluralism and human rights.
- The steady growth in the political profile of both China and the United States needed India to articulate policies, which could help in the preservation of its strategic space in Southeast Asia region.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, veering towards Southeast Asian nations at this juncture found a legitimate platform in India's strategic thinking. The Look East Policy launched by India in 1991 fostered India's relations with Southeast Asia. India started its journey to engage Southeast Asia under a multilateral framework and became a full dialogue partnership in December 1995. India also became a member of ARF in 1994 and the relationship was further elevated with the convening of the ASEAN-India Summit in 2002 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

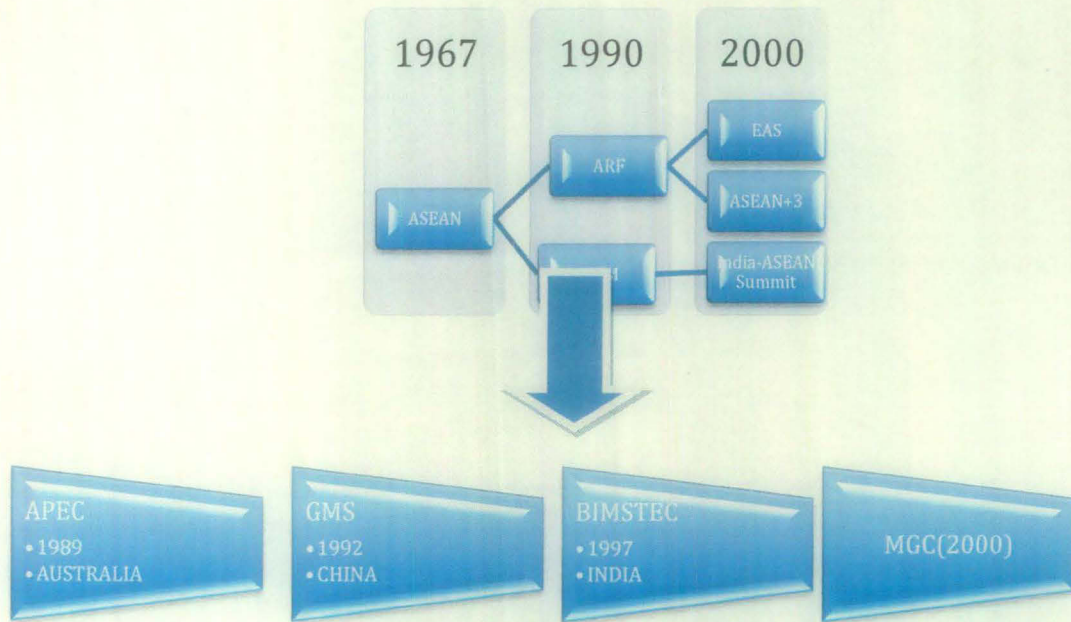
India and ASEAN states have explored the possibility of establishing joint working groups to combat the new threat after the 9/11 in U.S.A. Indian leaders have been vocal about pressing for a more coordinated effort to tackle traditional and non-traditional security threats. These avenues of security cooperation based on evolving convergences which were properly enunciated in the second phase of the Look East policy (2003). The following objectives were the new outcome of India and Southeast Asia relationship:

- a) Maritime security, combating and containing terrorism and transnational crime,
- b) Preventing the spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction, human trafficking and trafficking in small arms.
- c) Confidence building, conflict prevention and resolution,
- d) Energy and environment preservation

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid

**Table No: 2:** Graphical view of the cluster of multilateral frameworks in the Southeast Asian region



### Genesis of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation was formed basically to enhance the natural connectivity between India and Southeast Asia. At the ground level, the project is an attempt to enhance cooperation in the fields of transport and infrastructure sector, including roads and railways as well as greater cooperation in science, technology and human resource management. On the other hand, the five riparian countries, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos Cambodia, and Vietnam also formed a multilateral framework as Greater-Mekong Cooperation. With India these five courtiers conceived similar ideas and launched a similar program called “Suwanna Phum”-the older Indochina expression for Swarnabhoomi. This plan was aimed at promoting cultural tourism by joining hands and pooling resources to re-enforce advantages of physical proximity, common heritage and Buddhist links.

As far as India is concerned, Thai foreign minister Dr. S. Pitsuwan appraised Indian leaders about the programme and asked India to endorse this idea at the coming Post-Ministerial Conference of July 2000 when the decision of India's inclusion was taken in Bangkok. The name of Mekong-Ganga Swarnabhoomi was reportedly suggested by Thailand and accepted by India. More recent years have seen Vietnam also emerging as another major partner of India and their ties have been bourgeoning rapidly. However, Thailand has been held back by its internal political upheavals in the form of military coups that have plagued Thailand from September 2006. With the prime minister of Thailand, General Surayud visiting India from 25-28th June 2007, this relationship was further strengthened. This expanding bilateral bonhomie has greatly enhanced India's participation in MGCI-like multilateral forums in the region.

With the inception of the India's Look East Policy, India and ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) have embarked upon multiple bilateral, regional and sub-regional initiatives for bringing about the prosperity and wellbeing of people in the region. The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiatives is one of most notable outcome of such joint endeavours<sup>15</sup>.

The Mekong-Ganga cooperation was the originally part of the "Swarnabhoomi Program" initiative by India and five riparian counties of the Mekong River, namely, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. The MGC initiatives were formally launched on 10th November 2000 in the Laotian capital of Vientiane. This was the result of India's multifaceted interaction and engagement with GMS and it seeks to focus on building cooperation in sectors of tourism, culture, educational contacts and, transport and communications between India and these five MGC countries. The decision to launch this initiative was taken by these six foreign ministers at their meeting held on the margins of the 33<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference in July 2000 in Bangkok. The project particularly seeks to stress on the 'natural connectivity' of India based on cultural and civilization similarities.

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<sup>15</sup> MEA (2009) Ministry of External Affairs, Reinforcing 'Look East' Policy An article by Minister of State for External Affairs Mr.E.Ahamed, <http://www.meaindia.nic.in/interview/2006/01/17in01.htm>



In operational terms, therefore, the project is an attempt to enhance cooperation in the field of transport and infrastructure sector, including road and railways as well as greater cooperation in science technology and human resource management<sup>16</sup>. As its backdrop, these five riparian countries of Mekong had already been working together amongst themselves on these issue areas. They had already conceived of similar ideas and launched a similar program called “Suwanna Phum”–the older Indochina expression for “Swarnabhoomi.” This was aimed at the MGC to promoting culture, tourism by joining hands and pooling resources to re-enforce advantages of physical proximity, common heritage and Buddhist links<sup>17</sup>.

This MGC project provides an opportunity to India to enhance multilateral bonhomie and shape its proper place in its the region. At the same time, the five Southeast Asian countries also want to set up reciprocal relations with India as a counterweight to China’s peaceful rise in the region<sup>18</sup>.

Besides any multilateral connectivity between India and Southeast Asia, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation has more prospective to do something which has ability to impact to the people to people relation. The Trans-Asian highways project provides better connectivity from India’s Northeast to Thailand. Furthermore, the reconstruction of Nalanda University in India is the mark of the region’s strong will to preserve their heritage. Under this consideration, MGC prearranged a range of ministerial level meetings for the acceleration of regional collaboration.<sup>19</sup>

### **Ministerial meetings of the MGC**

- The first ministerial meeting of MGC was the founding stone of its initiatives. It was in the first meeting that a strategy was framed out and agreed upon to enhance cooperation on four fields specifically; tourism, culture, education and transport were taken. It also puts forward a range of scholarships for conservation common and promoting culture. The meeting also declares to

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Singh, Swarn (2007) Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiatives: Analysis and Assessment of India’s Engagement with Greater Mekong Sub-region, The Irasec Occasional Paper

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

organize combined research in the field of women empowerment, music and heritage conservation. This meeting also published the concept paper of the MGC.

- The second ministerial meeting was held in Hanoi and known as Hanoi Plan of Action approved to collaborate in different avenues within the preliminary of 6 years from 2001 to 2007, and particularly focusing on the obligation of accountability and transparency. All the country members also agreed to contribute to technological knowhow in a range of fields<sup>20</sup>.
- In the third ministerial meeting, which is known as the “Phnom Penh” road map for cooperation, the MGC was struggling to meet the targets. But the Members reviewed the progress and felt that the process is utterly slow. Finally, they approved to concretize the institutional interconnectivity and develop the potential within the region. The central part of the announcement in this meeting was that all the country members agreed to set up a tourism forum and work mutually on the basis of 2+1 forum<sup>21</sup>.
- The fourth ministerial meeting was organized in Cebu in 2007. This meeting was held after a long period and as a result the members began to realize that China had improved its connectivity with the Southeast Asian countries through GMS and it is more likely to be successful than MGC. At this meeting the Indian government permitted various scholarships for the GMS countries as well as deepened economic and commercial ties with the CLMV countries.

This new engagement between India and the five Southeast Asian countries witnessed the unprecedented expansion of bilateral and multilateral ties. With these regional initiatives India is trying to penetrate the ASEAN markets by enhancing the mutual economic benefits, transportation and infrastructural development and energy security. The East-West Corridor project and the Trans-Asian highway are some of the pioneering

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> India's External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, had inaugurated the Tamu-Kalewa road on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2001. This had generated enthusiasm for further infrastructure building and was to later develop into concrete plans for a multiple transport links between Tamu (India) and Thaton (Thailand) connecting India to the larger rail and road grid in Greater Mekong Sub-region

maneuvers undertaken by the six countries to promote transport facilities. When completed, the Asian highway project is expected to link up Singapore with New Delhi in South Asia via Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chin Minh city, Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Vientiane, Chiang Mai, Yangon, Mandalay, Kalemmyo, Tamu, Dhaka and Calcutta. India has already taken the first step in this direction and is involved in building the road linking Tamu (Manipur) to Kalemmyo, a key communication junction in the centre of Myanmar.<sup>22</sup>The project has also initiated certain innovative measures to improve air connectivity and for India it is providing ample opportunities to promote the linkages between India and Southeast Asian Countries.

In the meantime, as India emerges ahead in the economic sphere and looks for better commercial and cultural engagement with the five riparian countries in different ways. This initiative holds high promise. India has been a leading source of FDI in Thailand, Myanmar and Laos in various fields. Top Indian IT firms invested more than \$122 million in Vietnam, which helped to accelerate the Doi Moi process in Vietnam. The five member countries of MGC had also endorsed their agro-technologies with India and the latter finds it a platform to project its potential for manufacturing generic drugs and bio-products by which all members can benefit from its long experience in this sector. Consequently, India's relations with the other MGC countries still have great potential for development. In their necessary balancing of the two Asian giants, these countries place more trust of India than on China<sup>23</sup>.

However, other powers also keep interest with the MGC on account of India's economic surge and capability to change the geostrategic equation in the region. The multilateral arrangements also spread the democratic values on the decision making ground as well as provide an opportunity to poorer and smaller countries to participate and work on equal basis. It also provides an alternative to realist assumption of understanding the international relations where it enhances people to people contact and cooperation among the countries.

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<sup>22</sup> Singh, Swarn (2007) Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiatives: Analysis and Assessment of India's Engagement with Greater Mekong Sub-region, The Irasec Occasional Paper

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

Many government institutions, International Organizations and Non-governmental Organizations have undertaken research in the field of “Regional Multilateral arrangements” and many institutions planned the research on Mekong–Ganga Cooperation initiatives and its impact on regional and sub-regional developments specially, Institute of Southeast Asian studies (ISEAS) is one of the prominent institution to study the Southeast Asian related affairs, IPCS, Centre for Strategic and International Affairs (ISIS), China Institute of Contemporary International Affairs, National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), Institute of Defense and Strategic Analysis (IDSA), and East–West Center is the world’s prominent think tank which provides a very precious and genuine materials pertaining to the regional multilateral framework, those are published various papers, articles and books. Among the available literature on this theme, some of the noteworthy book and articles have been reviewed in this section.

### **Regionalism in the theoretical perspective**

**Louise L'Estrange Fawcett, Andrew Hurrell** in the “*Regionalism in world politics: Regional organization and international order*” provide a valuable insight of regionalism and resurgence of regional organizations especially in the post Cold War era and a comparative study of various regionalism processes that are underway in the region.

**Fawn, Rick** in the “*Globalizing the regional, regionalizing the global*” (2009) provides an in-depth study of the regions across the globe which are increasingly fundamental to the functioning of all aspects of world affairs from trade to conflict management and author provided a very deep insights of nature of the post cold war world.

**Mary Farrell, Björn Hettne, Luk and a Lange Hove** in the “*Global Politics of Regionalism: Theory and Practice (2005)*”. In this book the author explores the phenomenon of regionalism in a seeming contradiction to globalization. There is a growing tendency for countries to enter into regional arrangements as a response to the pressures of operating in a global marketplace. It also provides an exploration of specific case studies including the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, China, Europe, Asia and the Pacific. With an international range of contributors, including **Bjorn Hettne, Louise**

**Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell**, this in-depth and multi-disciplinary guide will be of interest to students across the social sciences and to the wider policy community.

**Nurit Kliot and David Newman's** "*Geopolitics at the End of the Twentieth Century: the changing world*" provide an excellent assessment of how the collapse of the Soviet Union and the impact of globalization have brought about changes not only to the territorial arrangement of sovereignty of states and their boundaries, but also to traditional notions of state, boundaries, sovereignty and social order. In this book the author focuses on the key regional and geopolitical characteristics of this global reordering, with an emphasis on Eastern Europe and South Asia.

Comparison of Greater Mekong Cooperation initiative with Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

**Evelyn Goh**, in the "*Developing the Mekong: Regionalism and Regional Security in China-Southeast Asian Relations (2007)*" In this book the author provides precious insights to China's rising economic and political strength which has been accompanied by proficient diplomacy and active promotion of regional cooperation, institutions and integration in the Southeast Asian region. Sino-Southeast Asian regionalism is exemplified by the development plans for the Mekong River basin, where ambitious projects for building regional infrastructural linkages and trade contribute to mediating the security concerns of the Mekong countries.

**Swaran Singh** in the "*Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiative: Analysis and Assessment of India's Engagement with Greater Mekong Sub-region (2007)*" In this project work the author provides extensive and deep insights into Mekong-Ganga initiatives with India's larger interest and involvements with this framework it provide extensive outlook to the development of MGC and politics behind the formation.

**Sudhir Devare** in "*India & Southeast Asia: Towards Security Convergence (2006)*" analyses the geopolitical situation in the Asia-Pacific after the post-September 11 period. India's deep integration with Southeast Asia through its historical and civilization linkages with the region have an opportunity to evolve a co-operative relationship not only with one another, but also with the major powers of the region. This book examines

the areas of comprehensive security and the growing understanding between India and Southeast Asia where there is less divergence and greater convergence.

**Vinod K. Aggarwal, Min Gyo** in “*Asia's New Institutional Architecture: Evolving Structures for Managing Trade, Financial, and Security Relations (2008)*” In this book both the authors analyze how effective are regional and interregional institutions in managing Asia's increasingly complex economic and security ties This question is currently the subject of intense debate between both academics and policymakers and this book deal very notably the ASEAN, ARF, and MGC etc.

**Kripa Sridharan, T. C. A. Srinivasa-Raghavan** in “*Regional Cooperation in South Asia and Southeast Asia (2007)*” In this book the author duo provides the general view about regionalism and provides a comparative sketch of regionalism in South and Southeast Asia in the light of recent regional developments. This book provides a good analysis of the prospect and possibilities of regional cooperation in the both the subregions, particularly this book also focuses on the post 2000 regional multilateral arrangements

India and China in the context of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

**Swee-Hock Saw, Lijun Sheng**, in the “*ASEAN-China Relations: Realities and Prospects (2005)*’ in this book the authors analyze the China and Southeast Asia engagement where both sides now have more in common than before, though differences still exist. This book examines some of the areas of convergence and divergence and the possible trajectories of the development of ASEAN-China relations.

**Michael J. Green, Bates Gill** I the “*Asia's New Multilateralism: Cooperation, Competition, and the Search for Community*” in this book the authors focus on a rising Asia that has embraced a new multilateralism. Asia continues to play out as states compete for a regional order that reflects diverse values and interests.

**Harsh V. Pant** in “*Indian Foreign Policy in a Unipolar World (2008)*” In this book the author examine futuristically the evolving trajectory of India's foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup>. centuries, through a range of issue which is the existed in the arena of India's foreign

policy. It is also grounded in the post-Cold War shifts in the global balance of power where India has emerged as a major pole, the book also examines the factors that have shaped the Indian response towards the multilateral arrangements and it focuses India's policy of engaging various multilateral arrangements, this book particularly focuses on Southeast Asian regional arrangements.

**Thingnam Kishan Singh** in "*Look East Policy and India's North East: Polemics & Perspectives*' (2009) In this book the author attempts to examine the dynamics of India's look East policy and its impact on the Northeast region, with special focus on Manipur as well as how north east has proved a gateway to establish strong relations with Southeast Asia region. In this book, the author also provides valuable insights to study the institutional cooperation among Southeast Asia region particularly which has emerged after 2000. It deals very rationally to India's engagement in the MGC framework.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- ❖ To discuss regionalism form the past to present.
- ❖ To discuss the concept of soft power in the multilateral arrangements.
- ❖ To analyze the importance of the sub-regional cooperation between the two regions.
- ❖ To analyze the connection between Greater Mekong Cooperation and MGC.
- ❖ To analyze the future prospects of the formwork from regional perspective.

## **HYPOTHESES:**

- ❖ New Regionalism has restored the significance of soft power based cooperation among India and Southeast Asian countries.

- ❖ Continuously formation of new multilateral arrangements in the Southeast Asian region by various powers like Russia China and India carve a picture of establishing a new kind influence in the region.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

- ❖ How soft power plays an important role to strengthen regional cooperation particularly in the Southeast Asian region?
- ❖ Why GMC has little more successful to MGC?
- ❖ What are the latest developments between India and Southeast Asian countries through Mekong-Ganga Cooperation?
- ❖ How MGC play an important role to India's Northeast frontier?



CHAPTER: II

**Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Agenda of Regional Cooperation**

## CHAPTER: II

### **Mekong-Ganga Cooperation's Agenda of regional Cooperation**

This Chapter deals with the organizational process, structures and bodies of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiatives. It also presents a deep insight into the comparison of MGC with a similar kind of framework, Greater Mekong Cooperation that connects the CLMV countries. Against this backdrop, regional and sub-regional Cooperation is no longer confined to the geographical parameters. Permanent membership of major external powers like United States, Russia and Australia to various Southeast Asian forums is the testimony of the above statement. China and Japan are other prominent countries associated with different Southeast Asian forums. As far as India is concerned, Mekong region is one of the most important economic and strategic gateways to the Southeast Asia region<sup>24</sup>. In this regard, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation has provided a better platform to show India's commitment to promote multilateral engagement in this region, which is connecting both the sub-regions. India's old historical, geographical linkages and cultural homogeneity is constructing a political perception in the Southeast Asia region. Mekong-Ganga Cooperation is a landmark effort to connect both the sub regions in terms of culture, economy as well as infrastructure.<sup>25</sup>

The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiatives (MGC) that was launched in 2000 brings together India and five ASEAN countries; undoubtedly it is proving a vehicle to pursue India's "soft power diplomacy"<sup>26</sup> in those countries that have been culturally influenced by India considerably. MGC has identified tourism, culture, education and transport & communication as priority areas of cooperation.

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<sup>24</sup> Kaul, Manmohini (2006) Regional Groupings: An Overview of BIMSTEC and MGC, New Delhi, *South Asian Survey*, p 4

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> "Soft Power" is a new kind of power, which has become increasingly discussed in the post cold war era. The term soft power was the first coined by the Harvard University Professor Josef Nye (1990) in his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* he further developed the concept in the book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in The World Politics*. Soft power in the international Politics arises from factors such as dominant values, internal policies and the manner of conducting the international relation of state. It is the ability to obtain through attraction rather than coercion or payments (Nye: 2004)

Under the backdrop of this initiative, India is striving to attract optimum investments from the neighboring countries to its Northeastern region, which will reap considerable benefits in the long run. Various effective measures required to actualize this dream are properly enunciated in the NER Vision 2020<sup>27</sup>. The Indian government has formed thematic working groups on various sectors like industry, major roads, railways, rural roads, financial services, Panchayati Raj & Local Self Government, poverty eradication, human resource development, tourism etc., besides IT enabled services, Cyber Connectivity, power, health, rural sector, sports and art & culture. MGC framework also formed thematic Working Groups that have prepared sectoral Plans of Action, based on the objectives in the Vision Document. These plans of action were presented before public representatives and media of the Northeastern states in Shillong in 2008. In addition to the trade relations between the two sub-regions, developing people-to-people contact is another significant motive of the framework. Above all, the MGC is trying to balance the two Asian giants, India and China in the region. In this regard the MGC countries place more trust of India than on China.

### **The Structural Framework**

The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation is comprised of three elements. Following three elements are considered the pillar of the framework:

- Annual Ministerial Meeting
- Senior Officials Meetings
- Working Groups

To throw light on the five working groups mentioned in the Framework structure of Mekong-Ganaga cooperation initiatives, the areas assigned to and the functioning of these five working groups are briefly discussed below: -

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<sup>27</sup> MEA (2010) Ministry of External Affairs Keynote address by Dr Sashi Throor, Ex-Minister of State on "India's North-East and BIMSTEC-A retrospect, <http://www.meaIndia.nic/mystart.php53115714>

**a. Group of Culture**

This group is helping the cultural preservation, Cultural knowledge and promotes the mutual understanding in arts and culture among the member's countries. This group is also responsible for the exchange of scholars, writers, performers and researchers among the member countries.

**Map No. 2:** The map of Mekong Sub-region

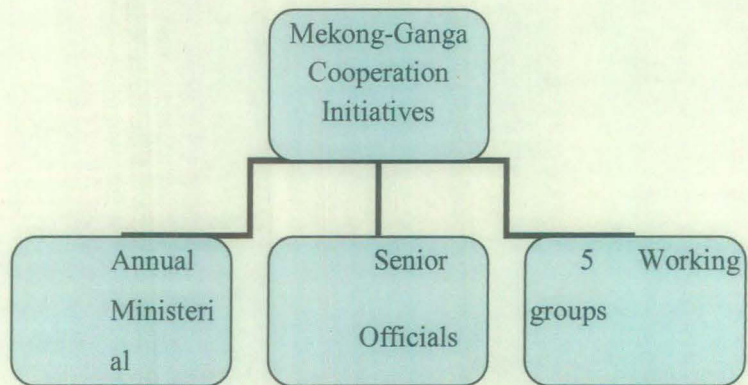


TH-18800

Source:<http://www.maps-thailand.com/map-mekong-subregion.php.html>



**Diagram No. 2:** Framework structure of Mekong-Ganaga cooperation initiatives



**b. Group of Tourism**

This group provides the facilities to accelerate tourism, which plays vital role in linking the member countries. This group is also providing the infrastructure linkages programs and necessary information to promote the Buddhist tourism and Eco-tourism among the member countries and beyond. It also develops the air and naval connectivity among the member countries.

**c. Group of Human resources Development**

This group is responsible for arranging the exchange of technology instructors and lecturers that is very crucial for the joint researches in the field of higher education. It also makes arrangement for English language training programs in non-English speaking countries.

**d. Group of Transportation**

This group is assigned the role of the development of land, air and water transportation linkages and the up gradation of internal telecommunication among the member countries.

#### **e. Group of Plan of Action**

This working group is entrusted to review the activities of other working groups and to set up new mechanisms for the accomplishment of the multilateral agendas.

#### **Agenda of functioning: the Ministerial meetings of the Framework**

The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation deals the administrative function of the framework through various bodies, but the agenda is set up after the extensive discussion in the Ministerial meetings, which is organized every year in the capital of the member countries on a rotation basis, however, the Ministerial meetings are not held regularly. Thus, the Ministerial meeting is the major body of functioning and implementing the common agenda of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiatives. The MGC has organized various meetings to tackle the regional challenges of development.

##### **1) Vientiane Plan of action 2000**

The very first ministerial meeting of Mekong-Ganga cooperation was held on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2000. In this meeting, ministers precisely focused and discussed on the genesis and evolution of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation initiatives. In this meeting the member countries agreed on a new road map for the development of both the sub-regions. This MGC Ministerial Meeting was concluded with the “Vientiane Declaration”. Underlining their common heritage and desire to enhance friendship, the Declaration outlined MGC objectives in four specific sectors namely:

- I. Tourism
- II. Culture
- III. Education
- IV. Transport and Communications

Particularly, in this meeting, the members launched the Mekong-Ganga Tourism Investment Guide, which aimed at promoting famous cultural, religious and Eco-tourism

sites, preserving old manuscripts, heritage sites and artifacts, translating classics, and providing scholarships<sup>28</sup>. It also envisaged developing road, rail and air links in tandem with other multilateral initiatives like Trans-Asian Highways, besides strengthening the intra-regional and sub-regional linkages.

The Vientiane Declaration adopted at the first formal Ministerial Meeting in Laos in November 2000<sup>29</sup>, had committed the member countries to develop transport networks in particular the 'East-West Corridor' and the 'trans-Asian Highway under the listed sectors of transport and communications.

The forum also committed to enhance the capabilities of the member states by cooperating in the field of Information and Technology. Here, India, owing to its expertise in the software field can contribute to the development of IT sector in the Mekong-Ganaga region in a big way. For India, this policy initiative was in line with India's policy objectives of reviving its historic linkages and engagement with this largest river basin of Asia. It is strengthening the link between these two river basin civilizations especially for purposes of knitting their people together through education and communication as locomotives for building mutual goodwill as the basis for seeking common development rather than the other way round<sup>30</sup>. What was particularly unique about the Vientiane Declaration was its emphasis on promoting joint research in other fields like dance, music and theatrical forms; and organize round-tables for journalists, writers and experts in the fields of literature, performing arts, women's empowerment, health and nutrition and the conservation, preservation and protection of heritage sites and artifacts.

Tourism is another field where the Declaration expected the MGC to conduct preliminary strategic studies for joint marketing, launch the Mekong-Ganga Tourism Investment Guide to facilitate the travel of people in the region, expand multi-model communication and transportation links to enhance travel and tourism and promote cultural-religious

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<sup>28</sup> Singh, Swarn (2007) Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiatives: Analysis and Assessment of India's Engagement with Greater Mekong Sub-region, The Irasec Occasional Paper

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

package tours. The MGC consented to encourage the establishment of networking and twinning arrangements among universities in the region, translate classics of MGC countries into other languages of the region and assured the participation in the Book fairs organized in the member countries on a commercial basis. Indeed, the Concept Paper prepared by their Senior Officials in their meeting held during 8-9<sup>th</sup> November 2000, and approved by the six ministers, said the cooperation arrangement primarily aimed at increasing tourism and will also serve as “building blocks’ for other areas of mutual benefit. The MGC’s objective was to announce to the International community its political willingness and aspirations aimed at strengthening our traditional bonds of friendship.<sup>31</sup>

The concept paper made it clear that Ministerial Meetings would be led by Foreign Ministers and would take place back-to-back with the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) held annually in Mekong-Ganga Cooperation.

## **2) Hanoi Plan of Action 2001**

The Second MGC Ministerial Meeting was held in Hanoi and it drew and adopted the “Hanoi Plan of Action” affirming their commitment to cooperate in four sectors that had been earmarked by the Vientiane Declaration as priority areas for cooperation. The “Hanoi Plan of Action” was the most extensive report with 6 years of time frame from July 2001 to July 2007 whose implementation progress was to be reviewed every two years. Amongst others, it highlighted the need for coordination and transparency underlining the need for using Information technologies for education and training and also for making websites to share information for efficient and effective planning. It also emphasized the need for developing projects involving more than one MGC member country but not necessarily all of them.<sup>32</sup>

In the space of mere six weeks of this meeting, the terrorists struck the United States on 11th September 2001. This unfortunate incident drastically changed the national priorities

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid



of many countries and the next MGC Ministerial Meeting could not be held for the next 24 months i.e. till June 2003. Post 9/11, the United States launched war against terrorism in Afghanistan (2001) followed by in Iraq (2003). Meanwhile, India also suffered a terrorist attack on its Parliament on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2001<sup>33</sup>. India responded with *Operation Parakram* that witnessed mobilization and forward deployment of 500,000 Indian troops for over eight months on India-Pakistan borders. Though, MGC priorities were to strengthen the atmospherics for India's engagement with these countries, this brief interlude did cause a slowdown in MGC spirit.

### 3) Phnom Penh Road Map 2003

The Third Ministerial Meeting of the MGC countries, chaired by Myanmar, was held in Phnom Penh (Cambodia), on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2003. The member-States reviewed the progress of Hanoi Plan of Action and “noted that the progress was slow and much remains to be done to translate this idea into a reality.” The Ministers, however, supported the trilateral road linkages among India-Myanmar-Thailand linking Tamu (India) and Thaton (Thailand) and finally agreed to strengthen the institutional network and expressed their agreement to give leading role to the chairing country, designate focal points for member states, and fix schedule for meetings<sup>34</sup>. In that spirit, they decided to fix their fourth Ministerial Meeting in New Delhi under the Chairmanship of Thailand in 2004 while Bangkok was to host a Senior Officials Meeting before the next Ministerial Meeting. The next Ministerial Meeting, at one stage, seemed to have been postponed indefinitely. However, this was also the period that was to see India becoming proactive in expanding network of its cooperation to pacific ground-level activities. It was also at the Third Ministerial Meeting that India offered to provide USD100, 000 for the MGC Fund, and, in addition, offered to provide \$ 1 million as grant for the establishment of a museum of traditional textiles in Siem Reap (Cambodia). This was an offer that had been made, in principle by the Indian Prime Minister during the first India-ASEAN Summit<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

This had generated enthusiasm for further infrastructure building and was to later develop into concrete plans for a multiple transport links between Tamu (India) and Thaton (Thailand) connecting India to the larger rail and road grid in Greater Mekong Sub-region. India also offered additional one hundred scholarships and to host a meeting of Tourism Ministers in New Delhi in 2004.<sup>36</sup> All these were appreciated and formally accepted by the MGC countries. In the end, this meeting adopted the “Phnom Penh Road Map for Cooperation” urging member countries to accelerate the pace of MGC activities and projects. Amongst others, the Road Map was to reiterate some of the ongoing suggestions like convening a meeting of Tourism Ministers in New Delhi in 2004, participating as MGC in the 2004 ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) to be held at Vientiane, holding cultural festival of Indian and Cambodian musicians and dancers in Siam Reap. It also urged for initiation of the feasibility study for a rail link from New Delhi to Hanoi of particular importance were two new innovations:

- (a) Heralding new cooperation in pharmaceutical sector, calling for developing affordable medicine for tropical diseases and harmonization of drug standards.
- (b) Suggesting innovative strategies for organizing funding for projects through 2+1 formula.

The Fourth MGC Ministerial Meeting was delayed by about three and a half years. Meanwhile, there was change of government from Bhartiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to Indian National Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA). Apart from a brief interlude, it did not upset the schedule of agreed ground level activities planned under the “Phnom Penh Road Map for Cooperation”. In 2004, India also launched a parallel semi-official sub-program in Mekong-Ganga relationship under the rubric of “South-South Economic Cooperation”<sup>37</sup>, which sought to promote cross-fertilization of experience and encourage trade and investments between India and three

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> The project South-South Economic Cooperation exploring the Mekong-Ganga relationship aims at exploring and analyzing trade and investment relationship between India and three countries of the Greater Mekong Sub-region, viz. Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. Future state of affairs will be explored keeping in mind the historical ties and geographical proximity between these countries and recent attempts to forge closer trade and investment cooperation.

Indo-china countries, namely, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. This was somewhat on similar lines as was the ACMECS initiative of Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinwatra that had kept both China and Vietnam out of it in order to ensure Thai leadership in this program.

#### **4) New Delhi Ministerial Meeting**

In the absence of Fourth Ministerial Meeting taking place in 2004 or 2005, the next annual MGC Senior Officials Meeting was held in New Delhi on 25th May 2005. This was chaired by Thailand and was convened to review the implementation of MGC projects and activities, and Prepare for the 4th MGC Ministerial Meeting to be held in India in 2006. Meanwhile, China seems to have made major strides in building closer cooperation with these five riparian states of Mekong. The GMS held its second Summit meeting in Kunming during 4-5<sup>th</sup> July 2005, where it renewed its commitment to the Strategic Action Framework for GMS Trade and Investment, the Strategic Action Plan for the GMS Biological Diversity Protection Corridor, signed GMS Agreement on the Facilitation of Transnational Passenger and Cargo Transportation and urged to accelerate implementation of several other agreements and negotiations. The meeting adopted the 'Kunming Declaration' and decided that the third GMS Summit will be held in Laos in 2008. Other highlights of this Summit included their dialogue with GMS business leaders; report on East-West Economic Corridor, Cross-Border Transport Agreement and many others agreements. AS regards India, following closely the second GMS Summit meeting in Kunming, the second two-week GMS plan on e-Governance was hosted during 11-22nd July 2005 at the Administrative Staff College (ASC) in Hyderabad, India. On 9-10th November 2005, New Delhi hosted the 120-members strong meeting of the Mekong Development Forum (MDF).<sup>38</sup>

A week later India hosted a Technology Summit for ASEAN, which included GMS participants. The year 2006 was to begin with India hosting in New Delhi the Sustainable Development Summit on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2006. In 2006, India had also set up Entrepreneurship Development Centers in Cambodia and Viet Nam, begun providing

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid

training to ASEAN diplomats at India's Foreign Service Institute with first session being organized in August-September 2006<sup>39</sup>. The long-awaited Fourth MGC Ministerial Meeting was finally held in New Delhi on 12th October 2006. Indian foreign minister, Pranab Mukherjee reiterated India's commitment to strengthen India's cultural and commercial ties with MGC countries<sup>40</sup>. At this 2006 summit, the MGC ministers thanked India for its assistance in flagship projects of the IAI and for extending 10 scholarships to each of the MGC member countries, besides, its offer to host 100 pilgrims from MGC countries during 2007. Thailand in Chair proposed India to be elected as Chair of MGC. The meeting also accepted India's offer to hold MGCI Ministerial Meeting in New Delhi in 2007. This has since been followed by visits to India by Thai Prime Minister, General Surayud Chulanont during June 2007 and by Viet Nam and Cambodia Prime Ministers during July 2007, which again revived the activism in India's engagement with MGC countries.

### **Achievements of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation**

Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, in general has become the platform to show India's commitment and engagement in the Southeast Asian region under the consideration of its Look East Policy. India used this opportunity to express its appreciation and announced a US\$10 million line-of-credit for Cambodia and Laos. It entered into three agreements on trade, technical education and tourism. It also extended Rs 25 crore assistance to Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiatives for the restoration of one thousand-year old Ta Prohm temple, and gave tariff concessions to CLMV countries. But other than these specific gestures it is important to enlist and examine India's core motivations that will determine the future of sub-regional ties. They are as follows:

- ✓ a) India has had rather close cultural and civilization links with the Burmese and Indo-Chinese people since ancient times. Political divisions between them had come about only recently and were the result of colonialism. The continuation of

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<sup>39</sup> ADB (2007) ASIAN Development Bank (Manila) Asian Development Bank: News and Events", 21st June 2007, available at <http://www.adb.org/media/Articles/2007/11970-mekongtransports-connections/>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

this was clearly reflected in their shared national liberation struggle and even in their nation building efforts during their initial years until they were divided again, by the Cold War dynamics.

- b) Connecting Kunming to Bangkok under MGC has strategic importance. China wants to use these links to access the Indian Ocean, which remains an issue of serious concern to both India as well as MGC countries. India and MGC states have also been concerned about China's manipulation of upstream waters of Brahmaputra and Mekong respectively. Restraining negative outcomes of China's over indulgence in this region, therefore, becomes crucial though India seeks to achieve this through its peaceful engagement with both Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and Beijing.
- c) Free flow of people in this larger region had been reality of life throughout the history. Discontinuity of these links remains at the core of India's difficulties with its turmoil ridden northeastern provinces that continue to pose a major economic and security challenge to New Delhi. These people had shared rituals and ethnic bonds and had been freely mixing, flowing and interdependent for centuries. Moreover, the fact that South Asian countries (including Myanmar) were colonized by the British and the rest of Indochina by the French, make them closer to each other. Connectivity and rail and road link have become a major focus of attention as they promise to raise the potential for cooperation among all six countries. The efficient and affordable rail and road links can also reduce the response time in dealing with insurgents and other problems of law and order and epidemics.
- d) India- MGC economic cooperation in services sector, especially in the field of knowledge and/or ICT sectors can be beneficial for both sides. This will be equally profitable for Indian private companies, which are becoming increasingly competitive. The overall purpose though remains to cement cultural and religious links, increased trade and tourists' flows play influencing role in building social

infrastructure as facilitators to achieve those long-term policy objectives<sup>41</sup>. That is to say we are friends and therefore we trade, and not that we trade therefore we are friends. And finally, from ancient value systems to the modern shared history of decolonization, India has a lot to learn from and lot to offer to Southeast Asian nations. Though not all the MGC projects have taken off very successfully in multilateral and inter-regional format of cooperation, yet it clearly underlines the increased and long-term interest of Indian foreign policymakers in engaging Mekong-Ganga countries.

To look at some of these MGC facilitated bilateral ties will be valuable. Vietnam has particularly emerged as one strong partner in India's recent initiatives. India is now amongst the top ten-investor countries in Vietnam and, both sides agree that this remains far lower than the potential. India's software companies viz., NIIT, APTECH, TCS, etc., have opened more than 40 branches in Vietnam. There are bilateral cooperation agreements in science and technology with Laos and Vietnam. India offered more than USD100 million to Viet Nam to set up Advanced Resource Center for the IT sector in Hanoi. Also, India offered USD122.07 million to Vietnam to strengthen IT infrastructure in six other institutions in Vietnam. All this Indian assistance in credit, education, training, science and technology and other fields is duly acknowledged by Vietnam as a major contribution to their cause of Doi Moi<sup>42</sup> (revival), Vietnam's modernization, industrialization and international integration drive. As for India, Vietnam has been one strong supporter of the country's claim for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and welcomes India's 'Look East' policy, especially India's engagement with ASEAN and MGC as also its participation in all other forums in the Asia-Pacific area. There has also been a boom in their people-to-people contacts with over 13,300 Indians visiting Vietnam during 2005 and this has great potential given that about a million Indians now

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41 Singh, Swarn (2007) Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiatives: Analysis and Assessment of India's Engagement with Greater Mekong Sub-region, The Irasec Occasional Paper, P.40

42 In the mid-1980s, Vietnam opened its borders to international investment in hopes of improving its economic atmosphere. The Vietnamese government launched new initiatives and passed new laws to facilitate and encourage Foreign Direct Investment in its ailing economy. However, after an examination of recent changes, this Note concludes that further reform is still required in order to encourage the necessary Foreign Direct Investment that will help aid Vietnam's feeble economy and allow it to prosper as the next great Asian economic power. (Brown: 14)

travel to Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand on an annual basis. Viet Nam's Deputy Prime Minister, Pham Gia Khiem, was in Delhi to attend the 12th meeting of the India-Vietnam Joint Commission on 27th February 2007<sup>43</sup>.

Amongst other agreements, the two countries resolved to achieve \$ 2 billion annual bilateral trades by 2010 from its current level of \$1 billion for 2006<sup>44</sup>. To establish Delhi-Hanoi air and rail link the two have already completed feasibility studies. Vietnam's Prime Minister visited India in July 2007 and many agreements were signed during his visit. All this reflects the new tenor of Indo-Vietnam ties, which have been greatly facilitated by the MGC deliberations. Similarly, India's ties with Myanmar have also completely changed over the last one-decade. Comparing their earlier limited contact, year 2006 saw India selling military equipment and weapons to the military junta. Following the discussions between New Delhi and Yangon in October 2006, the Indian government has also proposed to build a railway line from Jiribam to Imphal and Moreh – under the aegis of MGC. For this, India's Rites Ltd. has conducted a feasibility study commending a rail link between Jiribam, Imphal and Moreh at a cost of USD 73 billion. This would be the first step, said official sources, for building a trade route through Delhi-Hanoi Rail link. The proposed link would require construction of rail link between Tamu (Moreh), Kalay and Segyi at a cost of USD 33 billion in Myanmar and rehabilitation of the existing line from Segyi to Chaungu Myohaung at a cost of USD 7.059 billion.

Thailand has traditionally been the closest to India of all the countries. It has also been one of the most influential players in the region. While being a host to over 100,000 members of the Indian Diaspora, it has had extensive socio-cultural and economic linkages with India. Although Myanmar may have a far larger (3.5 million) Indian population, the Indian Diaspora in Thailand has been far more active, prosperous and influential.

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<sup>43</sup> Singh, Swarn (2007) Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiatives: Analysis and Assessment of India's Engagement with Greater Mekong Sub-region, The Irasec Occasional Paper, P.5

<sup>44</sup> ADB (2007) ASIAN Development Bank (Manila) Asian Development Bank: News and Events", 21st June 2007, available at <http://www.adb.org/media/Articles/2007/11970-mekongtransports-connections>

Thailand has clearly been India's traditionally strongest friend in the region. However, for long, this had not quite resulted in a robust economic engagement and it is only recently (coinciding with MGC) that Indo-Thai bilateral trade and investments have picked up momentum making India's Birla Group, TATA Group and others well-known names in Thailand. Thai interim Prime Minister, General Surayud Chulanont visited India during 25-28<sup>th</sup> June 2007. In a joint statement they agreed to move their ties beyond traditional social and economic linkages and to expedite negotiations for stronger defense and security relationships between the two countries. They also expressed confidence that Indo-Thai bilateral trade, which was worth USD 3.4 billion for 2006, will exceed \$ 4 billion for 2007. The last visit was made by then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinwatra in September 2001. Both sides then indicated that they were close to signing an FTA on goods, which would become effective by 2010. India also announced a 10 million grant for setting up the Sanskrit Studies Center in Thailand. India and Thailand have also been trying to forge stronger ties especially with India's northeastern region. On invitation of India's Minister in charge of Department of North Eastern Region, a Thai delegation led by its Commerce Minister, Krirk Krai Jirapaet, had visited Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya and held meetings in Northeastern Council headquarters in Shillong. In the end, all the experiences of the last decade do portend an accelerated integration of the Mekong countries into ASEAN as also to India's growing engagement with these countries.<sup>45</sup>

In its outline on Vision 2020 and the Hanoi Action Plan, which provides a detailed roadmap for socio-economic development of the region, ASEAN remains focused on creating incentives to integrate CLMV countries in the region. India with its traditional and cultural linkages with this region has unique advantage and can play a crucial role in realizing this ASEAN vision. However, in the last five years there has been few high-level visits from the Indian side and, for all the initial diplomatic rhetoric, the MGC has not received adequate attention to keep pace with growing indulgence by other stakeholder countries. For instance, India's Ministry of External Affairs has until now not yet designated a single official or desk to focus exclusively on its initiatives with the GMS countries let alone for the MGC. Its official website has absolutely little to offer in

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid



terms of any information or outline on India's policy or activities with regard to MGC. This makes it difficult in promoting ties with the countries and therefore, there is a need for greater focus on open sources, to follow ADB's strategy. In this direction India's IT capabilities could be of great help in the cultivation of the GMS, besides, involving non-governmental agencies. Institutions like the Research and Information System (RIS) for Non-aligned and Other Developing Countries, Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS), and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) have done some commendable works in holding awareness workshops and in imparting training to MGC compatriots, further strengthening the official MGC<sup>46</sup>. India's IT and pharmaceuticals sectors have witnessed great demand within MGC, yet human capital constraint has often adversely affected quality training in these countries. India known for its capacities for institutional arrangements for bringing about high quality manpower can really be of help to these countries.

In the area of cultural relations, though there have been exchange of artists, scholars, educationists etc. between India and the MGC, they should not be confined to the respective capitals and big cities alone. And finally, beyond periodical meetings and exchanges of officials, academics and experts for training and exposure, greater emphasis needs to be put on people-to-people contacts for enhancing mutual awareness and on technology transfers given our vast overlapping priority areas.

### **A comparative analysis of Mekong-Ganga cooperation and Greater Mekong Cooperation**

Mekong region<sup>47</sup> has been one of the economically and strategically most important gateways as far as India is concerned. This region also has an extensive influence of China and no discussion on MGC Initiatives can be complete without searching the answer of how Greater Mekong Cooperation is flourishing more vigorously in

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> The Mekong sub region is made up of by Cambodia, Laos Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. It is not a geographical region, but rather than, a development project mooted by the Asian development bank in the 1992, launched the programmed sub regional economic cooperation to enhance the economic cooperation, building relation on the shared historic and cultures, covering nine priority sectors, agricultures, energy, environment, human resource, investment, telecommunication, tourism transport, infrastructure and transport and trade facilitation (ADB: 1992)

comparison to Mekong-Ganga Cooperation. Undoubtedly, India was inspired by this framework to take the initiatives to carve a place akin to China in this region.

Many academicians and media commentators had sought to view MGC as a policy of 'balancing China'. The Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) is comprised of six countries that share the Mekong River namely, Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The GMS has a rich and diverse natural resource base, which has historically supported economic development and sustained rural livelihoods in the sub-region. Roughly one-third of the area is covered with forests, and another 40 percent consists of rich agricultural cropland. In addition, there are significant mineral deposits, especially coal and petroleum reserves, indicating high potential for hydropower development. Both riparian and coastal fishing provide food as well as income for the populace. The comparison between MGC and GMC can be briefly summarized as below:

- 1) As far as India is concerned this region has become the prime focus of India's foreign policy post-1991. Earlier, India has fluctuating policy towards this region. Now in the wake of China's rapid engagement and spread of its influence, India also wants to maintain the balance by engaging with the regional countries through multilateral efforts.
- 2) Ethnically, economically and politically, these countries are closely linked to China. Moreover, they are geographically closer to China than India and that is why the regional countries have a sense of common problem with common solution. This is the most vital factor that the GMS is more effective in this region than Mekong-Ganga cooperation Initiatives.
- 3) China's investment policy is the major catalyst for the growth of GMC. China is able to invest a huge amount in regional projects, besides, investing huge FDI in the member countries. On the other hand India has its own problems and limitations and so India cannot invest a huge amount as compared to China. Therefore, though countries in this region are culturally engaged with India but economically they are more connected to China.

- 4) India and China are rivals not only in strategic terms but also in the multilateral arrangements. China is the major stumbling block in the multilateral forum in Southeast Asia. India's membership is also at stake in East Asia Summit (EAS) and APEC on account of China's influence in the regional multilateral forum. Mekong-Ganga Cooperation is also not an exception to the Chinese influence. If India initiates any resolution in this forum, China considers it as a threat to its regional dominance and pressurizes the CLMV countries, which are already engaged with China in Greater Mekong Cooperation.
- 5) Most of the member countries except India are constantly politically instable and governed by authoritarian regime. As a result of this the multilateral process depends more on the incumbent government's interest and political situation in the respective country. The political instabilities severely hamper the multilateral processes, resolutions and projects. On the other hand Greater Mekong Cooperation is fundamentally an old framework and mostly financed by the Chinese side.

Mekong-Ganga Cooperation initiatives member countries invoke ancient cultural and religious linkages and are willing to revive them. They refer to the feeling of acting for an "Asian community" as well that was present during the liberation movements as well as in the Non-Aligned Movement. Such a political conjunction has certainly not been attained and may not be achieved in the near future either. As part of the MGC cultural activities, India has granted US\$1 million for the establishment of a museum of traditional textiles in Siem Reap in Cambodia. However, the MGCI countries play a relatively secondary role in the revival of Nalanda University in Bihar, unlike Singapore or Japan. Although the Vientiane Declaration placed emphasis on performing arts, journalism, literature, health, and the conservation of heritage sites, cultural cooperation appears limited to a few projects and there is no broad framework visible.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Rao, P V (2003) India and Australia: new horizons, Hyderabad, Mittal Publications, p173

To promote higher education, India offered hundred scholarships in different streams and 300 fellowships in the IT sector in 2003. In addition, India sponsors English courses in Southeast Asian countries. But are a few scholarships here and there really going to transform educational systems and people-to-people relations? Again, the cooperation is narrow, and wider options should be considered, such as setting up Burmese, Thai, Khmer or Vietnamese classes in India with the help of the MGC countries, or developing a course on ancient South and Southeast Asian common cultural heritage.

The sector of tourism has seen nothing but talks and meetings. An Expert Working Group met in Bangkok on 29 May 2001. Mention of a "Mekong-Ganga Tourism Investment Guide" was made as early as 2000, but it never saw the light of day. The Phnom Penh Road Map also talked of convening a reunion of Tourism Ministers in New Delhi in 2004 and taking part as a whole in the 2004 ASEAN Tourism Forum.

While the MGC falls far short of its objectives, some achievements have been made nevertheless. The MGC's intentions concerning transport and communications consisted of two aspects: first, road networks, which implied collaboration in the Trans-Asian Highways, and second, rail connectivity. The India-Myanmar sponsored Tamu-Kalewa road was inaugurated in February 2001, followed by the East-West Corridor linking the Bay of Bengal to the South China Sea, a project finalized in December 2006. The South Corridor, linking Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, and the North-South Corridor, linking Kunming in Yunnan to Bangkok is expected to be complete around 2012. As for rail connectivity, the feasibility study to link New Delhi with Hanoi has been completed, but construction has not yet begun.

## CHAPTER: III

### **Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiatives: Comparison with BIMSTEC**

## CHAPTER: III

### **Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiatives:**

#### **Comparison with BIMSTEC**

In the wake of increasing influence of globalization<sup>49</sup>, India launched sweeping economic reforms<sup>50</sup> in 1991 and thereby embarked upon the great task to realize its potential and claim its worthy place in the global economic and political sphere. India's keenness to the formation of sub-regional Cooperation forums like BIMSTEC and MGC is clearly discernible. The establishment of these regional initiatives has marked the beginning of a new era of political and economic cooperation among neighbours in South Asia and Southeast Asia. In this new setup, India's role has been instrumental, being a prominent founding member and an active participant. These groupings are connecting both the sub-regions of South Asia and Southeast Asia. These groupings are complementary to each other and play vital role in connecting people as well as providing basic facilities to the people of both the sub-region without any political hurdles and clashes.

As far as India is concerned, it is an interesting break from India's previous outlook where the sub-region was almost completely ignored and very little effort was made to either develop a regional approach or build linkages with neighbouring countries. The only significant regional initiative was the formation of SAARC in 1985, but this organization could not evolve the way it was envisaged primarily due to inter-regional tensions and has in fact proved to be an obstacle in the building of regionalism in South Asia. It is well known that India's foreign policy is guided by the requirement to secure

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<sup>49</sup> The term globalization encompasses a range of social, political, and economic changes across the globe. Globalization expands and accelerates the exchange of ideas and commodities over vast distances. It is common to discuss the phenomenon in highly generalized terms, but globalization's impacts are often best understood at the local level.

<sup>50</sup> Due to the fall of the Soviet Union and the problems in balance of payment accounts, the country faced economic crisis and the IMF asked for the bailout loan. To get out of the situation, the then Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh initiated the economic liberalization reform in the year 1991. This is considered to be one of the milestones in India economic reform as it changed the market and financial scenario of the country. Under the liberalization program, foreign direct investment was encouraged, public monopolies were stopped, and service and tertiary sectors were developed.

safe neighborhoods through economic cooperation and strengthened political relations; nevertheless, in the light of deteriorating internal situations in the neighbouring countries, India cannot lose sight of its economic and security interests. In the backdrop of India's Look East Policy, India is trying to get a proper place akin to China in the Southeast Asia. China and India are the two major economies vying for their influence in the emerging economic integration in the region<sup>51</sup>. India's growing economic integration with the Southeast Asian region is welcomed by the ASEAN countries, which consider India capable of balancing China's influence as a fast growing economy and a tough competitor. In Southeast Asia, it is an economic giant and with the signing of the ASEAN-China Accord in November 2004, it became the world's biggest free trade area.

There are a number of reasons for which India was interested to form regional grouping like BIMSTEC providing the much-needed connectivity to both the sub-regions. They are:

- I. India needed a working alternative to almost non-functional South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) where the decision could be arrived at swiftly and unanimously without any hurdles;
- II. Geopolitics and security importance of the sub region;
- III. India's long-standing border dispute with China;
- IV. India's economic reform forced it to search for new economic destinations and ASEAN region provides better economic opportunities;
- V. Strategic advantages of enhanced relations with Myanmar
- VI. In contrast to barriers such as weak political institutions and human rights violations prevalent in South Asian region, BIMSTEC offers a good model of regional cooperation.

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<sup>51</sup> kaul, Manmohani (2006) Regional Groupings: An Overview of BIMSTEC and MGC, New Delhi, *South Asian Survey*. p 8

## **BIMSTEC and MGC in India's Look East Policy**

BIMSTEC, like Mekong-Ganga Cooperation can be viewed as another effort to forge a closer link between Southeast Asia and south Asia. Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) which was earlier known as BISTEC is a Grouping of seven members –Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand and was formed in 1997. It is another vehicle to pursue India's "Look East Policy" and promote the idea of sub-regionalism.<sup>52</sup> BIMSTEC is a unique initiative that provides a link between South Asia and South East Asia by way of economic cooperation and cooperation in other identified areas. Starting with 6 sectors, the BIMSTEC agenda of cooperation has expanded to 14 sectors namely:

- 1) Trade and investment
- 2) Technology
- 3) Energy
- 4) Transportation & Communication
- 5) Tourism
- 6) Cooperation in the field of agriculture and fisheries
- 7) Cultural Cooperation
- 8) Environment and Disaster Management
- 9) Public Health
- 10) People-to-people contact
- 11) Poverty Alleviation
- 12) Counter-Terrorism
- 13) Transnational Crime
- 14) Climate Change

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<sup>52</sup> Chakrabarti, Tridib (2008) BIMSTEC: Origin, Growth and Progress, New Delhi, world Focus, p 29



BIMSTEC is an amalgamation of Thailand's Look West Policy and India's Look East Policy. The main consideration for their formation appears to have been India's desire to find a successful alternative to SAARC. India's former Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, admitted SAARC's ineffectiveness when he stated, 'If the thrust of initiatives of some of the members is seen to be patently hostile to India or motivated by a desire to contain India in some way, SAARC would continue to lack substance and energy.' Elaborating further, he stated that SAARC continued to remain 'largely a consultative body, which has shied away from undertaking even a single collaborative project in its twenty years of existence. In fact, there is deep resistance to doing anything that could be collaborative (Saran: 2005).

The main motive behind the formation of the BIMSTEC is to set up a framework that is able to promote the regional economic development by utilizing the existing potential of the region. In this regard BIMSTEC formed various economic ventures, mutual assistance framework and building the mutual understandings of the member countries. In contrast to SAARC in South Asia and ASEAN in Southeast Asia, BIMSTEC is a unique regional grouping that is fostering economic and social developments in both the sub-regions.

Most importantly, it is establishing the strategic links between the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and Greater Mekong Cooperation. The regional economic integration is also an important factor behind the establishment of BIMSTEC. However, even the second summit of BIMSTEC failed to give any signal in this regard, as evident from the fact that no decision was taken to establish a permanent secretariat for BIMSTEC.<sup>53</sup>In the fourth BIMSTEC Summit, the member countries finalized an agenda that reflects BIMSTEC's likely preference for a strategy of developing the sector-wise cooperative structures rather than envisaging a full-fledged framework of a regional organization with long-term goals. This tendency reflects BIMSTEC only as a sub-regional framework of cooperation between South and Southeast Asia and it also underestimates its potential of evolving as a regional organization like SAARC and ASEAN. Though BIMSTEC has provided a linkage between South and Southeast Asia, there exists an ample scope for strengthening

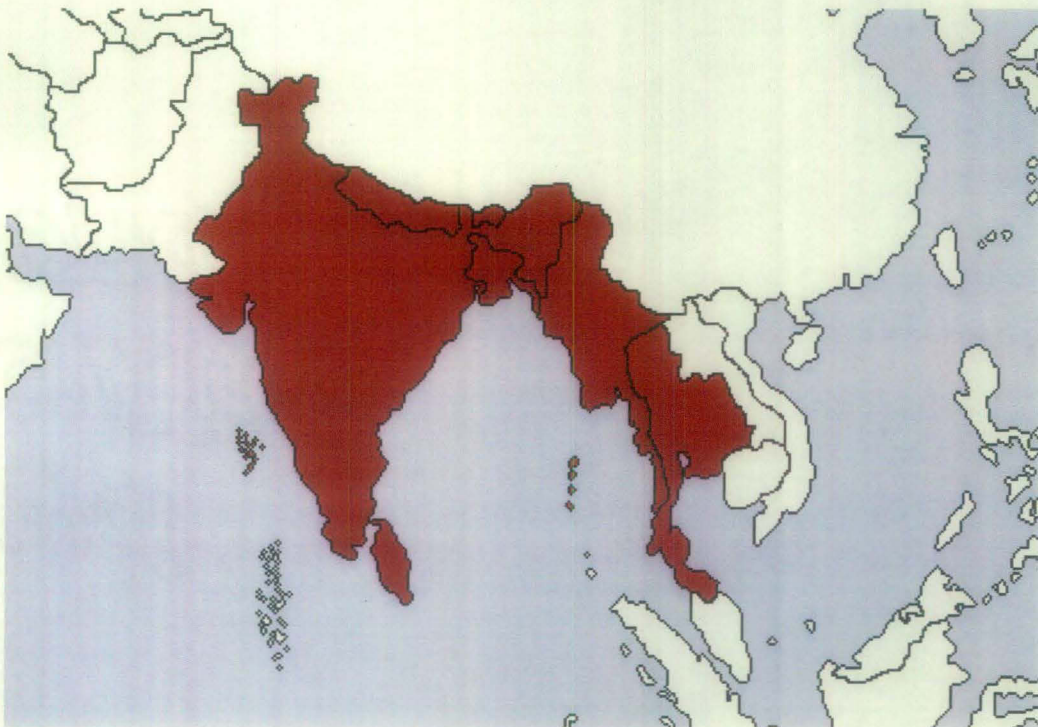
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<sup>53</sup> Naidu, GVC (2008) BIMSTEC and its geo-strategic importance, New Delhi, World Focus, p 22

multi-sectoral cooperation within BIMSTEC, which can facilitate its evolution as a viable regional organization.

As far as India is concerned, BIMSTEC in comparison to SAARC offers an alternative and provides a bridge to other frameworks, especially the strategic link between India and MGC. Both these sub-regional frameworks support the idea of a wider Bay of Bengal community, which would also include Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore<sup>54</sup>. According to this formulation, the countries from the 'extended

**Map No.3:** The map of BIMSTEC countries



BIMSTEC countries map, Source: <http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/7336452>

neighbourhood' would rightly become a part of the immediate neighbour. It is imperative to materialize the potential of regional cooperation in the Southeast Asian region; there are two alternatives viz. BIMSTEC and MGC available before India. Mekong-Ganga

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<sup>54</sup> Kaul, Manmohani (2006) Regional Groupings: An Overview of BIMSTEC and MGC, South Asian Survey 2006;

Cooperation provides a supplementary advantage to the sub-regional cooperation between India and Southeast Asian region without being affected by the Chinese influence and the delay caused by the slow engagement with ASEAN and other supportive frameworks.

However, the BIMSTEC is not appearing to be evolving as a full-fledged regional cooperative framework, the desired impetus in this regard can be provided by fostering a sense of community or region in the minds of the people. But considering the diverse cultural landscape of the region, the task of evolving a common sense of identity is likely to be very difficult. Nevertheless, to enhance the people-to-people contact and accelerate the economic integration of the BIMSTEC, the second summit considered the rapid development of the transport infrastructure as a key issue. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has conducted a study in this regard. The role of ADB has been significant in the economic integration of another sub region of Asia, the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). As a result of the coordination between ADB and the member countries the GMS, has achieved an adequate level of connectivity, which accelerated the process of regional economic integration. Now the total intra-regional trade in the GMS has increased almost 12 times of the 1992 level. In addition, the annual tourist arrival has doubled from 10 million in 1995 to 20 million in 2005. What happened in the GMS can also be replicated in the case of the BIMSTEC.

Given the strategic advantage of the BIMSTEC, exercises to strengthen it will likely to be continued as a priority area in the India's Look East Policy design. It is evident from the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's statement that time has come for the idea of BIMSTEC. However, it is yet to be decided that in what way the idea will be shaped, whether it would be limited merely as a bridge between SAARC and ASEAN or will move beyond the linkage syndrome.

Thailand being the sole country representing Southeast Asia assumes a significant role in strengthening India's engagement with BIMSTEC as well as MGC. Thailand provides a kind of stable retail base, especially in the textile sector; this contributes to the strengthening of the service sector by providing the much-needed high-skilled labour.

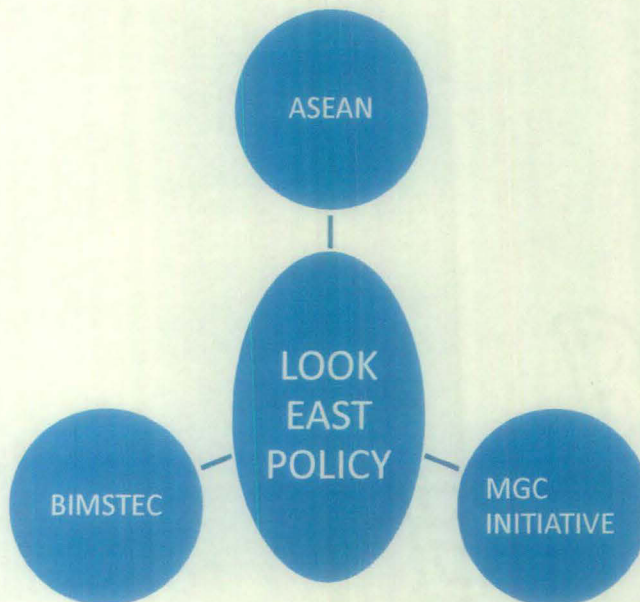
These people mostly work in multinationals in Bangkok and other cities. In this way they also contribute to the growth of Thailand's export sector. Thai Indians are contributing to the strengthening of India-Thailand bilateral relations through various means. First, in 2007, the Northeastern Development Finance Corporation (NEDFC), India, signed a MoU with the India-Thai Business Forum headed by Satish Sehgal and the Indo-Rama Thai Company headed by Vinod Gupta. This MoU aims at bringing India's Northeast region closer to Thailand by increasing the direct trade between the two regions. Sehgal was instrumental in the signing of this MoU. Second, it is estimated that roughly more than 25,000 students from Thailand travel to India for educational purposes. Here it must be underlined that Thai Indians send their children to India for education and through them the local Thais have also come to know the standards of education in India thereby increasing the flow of students from Thailand to India. This not only helps in strengthening India's educational sector but also brings foreign currency to Indian economy. Third, with the greater movement of people from both sides, it helps in a better mutual understanding. Fourth, Indians in Thailand have helped in the country's industrial development by setting up of big-ticket projects. Birla Industries established their base in Thailand some 32 years ago; Indo-Rama also entered Thailand some 12 years ago. Apart from these direct contributions Thai Indians also indirectly help in human resource development. There are many schools run by Indians like the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial School in Sukothai, Nehru Memorial School in Chiang Mai and the Hindu Samaj School in Bangkok. Their main support comes in the form of scholarships, equipment, furniture, uniforms and soon.

It was indicated by the Singhvi Committee that Thai Indians could play a possible role in the BIMSTEC and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation. According to this report, Thai Indians want increased interaction between the Thai Board of Investment (BOI) and Indian chambers of commerce like FICCI to promote understanding of markets. By addressing some of their concerns, like increased air connectivity to Northeastern part of India from Thailand, the Indian establishment can help Thai Indians in exploring Indian markets and in expanding the area of bilateral economy.

### **BIMSTEC and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation: Complementary or overlapping**

BIMSTEC and MGC are two multilateral frameworks existing side by side for the development of two sub regions namely South Asia and Southeast Asia; Where Mekong-Ganga cooperation is purely connected to India and Thailand along with CLMV countries. Now, the question arises that what was the need to form another framework when we still have great potential for development through BIMSTEC. The answer lies in the fact that in balancing the two Asian giants, these countries place more trust on India than on China, however, the impact of the MGC is seen more in bilateral relations rather than in multilateral initiatives. Although the MGC's impact remains flimsy, India's active business presences along with the soft powers deployed in these countries generate larger diplomatic gains. For instance, India's extensive IT cooperation with Vietnam wins in return Vietnam's support for India's claim for a permanent UNSC seat.

**Table No 4:** Matrix of multilateral frameworks in Southeast Asia under the Look East Policy



Perhaps this is why, in January 2007, India's Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahmed,<sup>55</sup> labeled the MGCI a "pillar of India's Look East policy". To advance its "Look

<sup>55</sup> Anindya Batabyal(2006) Balancing China in Asia: A Realist Assessment of India's Look, Beijing, China Report 2006, p 11

East" policy, India used multilateralism as a primary tool. Apart from becoming a dialogue partner of ASEAN, New Delhi also took part in other organizations, such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral and Technical Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Encompassing more than 20 percent of the world population in seven countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand) and a combined GDP exceeding US\$1 trillion, BIMSTEC has the potential to emerge as a meaningful economic bloc so that its aim of facilitating and improving ties between member countries could be realized. Apart from economic integration, which remains the organization's top priority since its creation in June 1997, BIMSTEC has also diversified interests such as cooperation in the energy, agriculture, technology, transport and communication sectors, besides anti-narcotics, counter-terrorism measures, and handling of refugees, among others. However, BIMSTEC's performance during the last ten years portrays it as an extremely inefficient sub-regional body, mired in politico-bureaucratic complexities.

Although economic integration and trade facilitation undoubtedly constitute the organization's *raison d'être*, member countries have not been able to agree on the modalities to implement a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). In order to create an integrated market, the FTA was expected to progressively cut down tariffs to facilitate the circulation of goods, liberalize trade in services, stipulate common commercial rules, and facilitate investment throughout the region by creating a uniform and transparent investment regime. The "least developed countries" (LDC) in the region were allowed a delayed calendar, as early reforms could have damaged their economies. Trade between India and members of BIMSTEC has grown in the past ten years, but BIMSTEC's role in this regard has been very uncertain. Moreover, this evolution remains limited when compared to the trade between India-China, India-US, or India-ASEAN.

Similarly, anti-terrorism cooperation has exposed the gap between promises or resolutions and their implementation. In the first summit meeting of the BIMSTEC, held in India in July 2004, member states decided to set up a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crimes. The JWG held its first meeting in

December 2004 and identified four fields and their "lead shepherds," whose reports were due at the second meeting. No mention of the working group has been made since then.

A major hurdle in counter-terrorism and intelligence sharing is BIMSTEC's lack of a supranational approach. As BIMSTEC's existence relies on national governments, any decision affecting a state's sovereignty (or perceived as such) has no reason to be approved. Thus, one may doubt the readiness of member countries to cooperate on such aspects as intelligence, which is fundamental to national sovereignty. This inhibits BIMSTEC's capability to address issues that individual countries are not willing to address.

From an India-centric perspective, BIMSTEC's immobility as an organization would be compensated if it served India's "Look East" policy. However, this is hardly the case either, as India's involvement in Southeast Asia never employs BIMSTEC. Although BIMSTEC offers India a terrestrial link to Southeast Asia, the project of an India-Myanmar-Thailand highway, linking Moreh (Manipur) to Maw Sot (Thailand) through Bagan (Myanmar), does not show any sign of progress, even though a field survey was launched in February 2003 and a ministerial meeting was held in December 2003.

India has developed its commercial relations with Myanmar in the past decade, but BIMSTEC hardly helped further in this direction. In fact, the multilateral process of the India-Bangladesh-Myanmar pipeline has not succeeded and India's presence in Myanmar is being ensured through bilateral deals, such as the US\$100 million Kaladan project.

BIMSTEC has given no fillip to military cooperation either. India-Myanmar joint counter-insurgency operations started before BIMSTEC with Operation Golden Bird, and may very optimistically be termed as a partial success. Unfortunately, securing the region through military cooperation is probably a prerequisite for economic integration, as, for example, the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway could not be constructed in an insurgency-stricken environment. In addition, BIMSTEC has not provided a grip on Myanmar for either India or Thailand, any more than ASEAN's "constructive engagement" has made the generals politically dependent on their Southeast Asian neighbors.

Thus, one is forced to conclude that BIMSTEC is a failure on all fronts and will seemingly not take off. It is being out of the mainstream is more a sign of its inactivity rather than its opaqueness. Even as it remains an India-driven initiative, New Delhi's sporadic and half-hearted engagement holds out no promise of its ever picking up speed. The organization's progress is hindered by the fact that BIMSTEC is only what member countries contribute to the process and has no life of its own. Therefore, it appears to be more of a token platform than a place for substantive cooperation.<sup>56</sup>

### **Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and BIMSTEC's role in sub-regional development**

Mekong Ganga Cooperation initiatives and BIMSTEC are playing a vital role in the economic and social connectivity of the region with continuing affiliation with ASEAN, which is the heart of India's Look East Policy. BIMSTEC is covering 14 areas of cooperation whereas the MGCI is focusing on the similar four areas. Both Mekong-Ganga Cooperation initiatives and BIMSTEC frameworks have enormous capability to work on the ground root level, which has affected people to people relation and their daily life especially in the frontier areas of the member countries. Mekong-Ganga cooperation initiatives have little larger potential to connect Southeast Asia, which is the main focus of India's broad strategy of Look East Policy.

### **Implications for India's Northeastern areas**

Since the inception of Look East Policy, India's northeast has emerged as a major focus of discussion of this new policy. It shares the 4500 km border with Myanmar, Bangladesh, China, Bhutan, and Nepal where ASEAN has been a leading framework to pursue India's multilateral ambition with the Southeast Asia region. BIMSTEC and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation evolved to connect the region along with ASEAN, and here India's northeastern part acts as the gateway to connect with the sub-region. Decade long India are facing insurgency movement and many other illegal activities like human

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<sup>56</sup> Batabyal, Anindya (2006) *Balancing China in Asia: A Realist Assessment of India's Look East Policy*, Beijing, China Report 2006, p 11



trafficking, drugs trafficking and small arms proliferation in the sub region and the main region behind the this instability on account of poor infrastructure.<sup>57</sup> In the last few years the Indian government has realized the significance of the development of the northeast region to foster deep and wide relation with the Southeast Asian countries. Various ministries of the Indian government such as Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Trade and Commerce, and Development of North Eastern Region have been projecting northeast as tool of integration with Southeast Asia and it can also be proved a panacea for overcoming the political and security challenges faced by the entire region<sup>58</sup>. The Public Diplomacy Division of the MEA has organized various conclaves, spelling out the strategic necessity for the northeastern states to look towards Southeast Asia and the benefits that can accrue to the region. Not to be left behind, the provincial governments have begun showcasing their natural and human resources and investment potential, guaranteeing handsome returns to foreign investors. Various Northeast Trade and Investment weeks were organized in New Delhi, Guwahati and Bangkok in 2007. BIMSTEC and MGC entailed connecting northeastern states with Southeast Asia through road networks.

**(a) Reducing China's influence in the region**

Northeast in general is like a border of Southeast Asia as far as India is concerned. China is on the border of all the members of the MGCI and BIMSTEC except Sri Lanka. China is constantly adopting the policy of hidden supports to the rebellious groups and supply arms to these groups. China is also supporting the Military JUNTA of Myanmar by engaging in many infrastructural projects in Myanmar. It supports Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, two SAARC countries that create anxiety to the long term India's security and strategic interests in this region too. The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and BIMSTEC, to a large extent, have the potential to deal with infrastructural imbalance and make better

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<sup>57</sup> Das, Samir Kumar (2008) BIMSTEC or the big leap Forward for India's northeast New Delhi, World focus, p41

<sup>58</sup> Singh, Swarn (2007) Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiatives: Analysis and Assessment of India's Engagement with Greater Mekong Sub-region

social economical connectivity to the people of the sub regions. These regional frameworks enhance the people to people contact and develop enormous infrastructure projects that lead to the growth of common sense of entire region. This effort to establish India's image akin to China in the region and reducing the Chinese influence, proved a milestone in India's multilateral strategy.

The overall approach to identifying security risks in the region has shifted away from insurgency and the China-threat theory to economic backwardness and limited integration with mainstream India. It is now being argued that an economically underdeveloped northeast is more prone to insurgency, political instability and external security threats. Creating stakeholders by engaging the regional resources in developmental activities and building local capacity would help the Indian state expand the constituencies for peace in the region. Such an approach is being facilitated by the announcement of new ambitious projects, large-scale investment, and entrepreneurial incentives. For example, the energies of the youth could be channelized in a more positive manner by engaging them in developmental activities. While speaking at the Guwahati Conclave in June 2007, Jairam Ramesh, Minister of State for Trade and Commerce, clearly spelt out that the future of India's northeast lies in emotional and political integration with the rest of India and economic integration with the rest of Asia.

#### **(b) Economic development of the region**

The northeast region is a land-locked region and the most backward area of India. The economic development can bring prosperity in this region in terms of infrastructural development. Wide-ranging unemployment among youths and the denial of economic opportunities are believed to be primary factors responsible for youths falling prey to insurgent groups. Economic prosperity of the region is likely to bring down insurgency from the region.

By way of the common transnational region the external linkages and sources of the rebel groups and insurgents can be effectively snapped. For example, joint operation conducted by the Indian and Myanmar forces has been very effective. BIMSTEC could provide Myanmar with a common platform of interest with the large democratic countries like

India that provide it with abundant economic, technological and defense support and an indirect legitimacy to the subjugation of democracy in the country by the military junta. Northeast India has two important considerations, reflecting long-term strategic objectives of the Look West Policy of Thailand.

- i. India's northeast offers a substantial alternative market and a transit corridor for sub-regional economies in the Bay of Bengal for the export-driven economy of Thailand.
- ii. The investment in the northeast would enable the Thai companies to further diversify the sources of raw materials especially natural resources such as rubber and bamboo, which constitute Thailand's important international exports.

The investment strategies of the Thai companies have been influenced by two important considerations, their previous experiences and their assessment of local risks. The previous experiences refer to the economic crisis, which gripped Southeast Asian economies in general and Thai economy in particular. Thai MNEs and SMEs, while proposing to invest in the Northeast have opted for joint venture instead of single ownership. Northeastern states are trouble-prone areas and therefore substantial business activities should be in the relatively safe areas and, therefore, main target states are relatively safer states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Assam and Tripura.

### **Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and BIMSTEC's role in building relation with Myanmar**

Since India's initiative of multidimensional Look East policy, Myanmar remained a top priority of its foreign policy. Both the countries are participating in the BIMSTEC and MGC with the desire to have close relationships with the neighbouring economies for mutual benefits. India's conciliatory efforts towards ASEAN after the lukewarm years of the Cold War were aimed primarily at promoting economic, multilateral and security ties. Myanmar, India's closest Southeast Asian neighbour was the bridge linking India to Southeast Asia. After the Myanmar's admission to ASEAN in 1997, India felt it was imperative to consolidate ties with the junta overlooking the earlier emphasis on

democratic ideals. Myanmar would be the entry point from where India could operate the Look-East policy<sup>59</sup>.

**(a) Developing the energy relation:**

Between India and Myanmar energy is the main basis of forming the greater trade, attract the investment and commercial cohesion in BIMSTEC. ONGC (videsh), GAIL and now TATAs are exploring and extracting gas in the Rkhaine state, Bay of Bengal Myanmar. In the pursuit of energy, Myanmar is important not only for India but also for the other sub-regional countries. BIMSTEC and Mekong-Ganga cooperation are playing a role in providing the transportation facility in the region. MGCI also provide connectivity across the region and link other existing framework with regional needs. Myanmar is the lead country in the energy sector and India has a expertise in oil refining and modern conservation facility. For this reason, BIMSTEC has established an energy center in India.

**(b) Development of tourism:**

Myanmar and India's northeast region are exceptional tourist destinations. It is another area of cooperation among the countries of this region, and these areas remain largely unexplored to the rest of the world. Myanmar is full of flora and fauna, natural scenic beauty, unique performing arts and handicrafts. The Look East Policy of India is constantly trying to rejuvenate the cultural and historical linkages in the region, where Myanmar proved like a bridge to connect India in the northeast. BIMSTEC and Mekong-Ganga cooperation take many initiatives to increase tourism in Myanmar. BIMSTEC's Kolkata declaration was adopted in 2005. It is a major initiative taken by BIMSTEC and that year was also promoted as the BIMSTEC year. If these linkages and infrastructures are promoted well, this region can become one of the best tourism hubs in the world.

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<sup>59</sup> Lall, Dr Marie (2008) India-Myanmar Relations – Geopolitics and Energy in Light of the New Balance of Power in Asia, Singapore, institute of South east Asian Studies, p.11

**(c) Reducing the security problems**

The development of close relation with Myanmar has become imperative in tackling the security problems in this region that includes insurgency, small arms proliferation and drug trafficking with the cross border dimensions. India is grappling with the problem of endemic insurgency in the northeast that is primarily sustained by the logistics support and the safe haven provided by the Myanmar's side. This problem is not limited to small pockets only but has engulfed the entire region. At present more than 30 camps belonging to insurgent outfits such as ULFA, NSWCN (K), CNF, UNLF and PLA are actively functioning in the region. The region has emerged as the Small and Light weapons (SALW) market. Of late, activities of Islamic terrorist groups like HUJI have been witnessed in the region, which adds to the already alarming situation in the region. To address the menace of insurgency and terrorism in the region, a meeting was held in Napitaw, Myanmar followed by BIMSTEC establishing a joint working group to oversee counter-terrorism measures and the progress made regarding the control of trans-national crimes and illicit drug trafficking. In the light of these developments, Myanmar's role is very crucial for the containment of insurgency that will be restore peace in the entire region. The contribution made by Mekong-Ganga cooperation in the development of infrastructure facilities like transport and communication sector is also very significant in this regard.

**BIMSTEC and MGC are complementary vis-a-vis the infrastructure and economic development in the member countries**

**(a) Thailand:**

Thailand is one of the richest countries in the region and is an important member of both the frameworks. Thailand is very much eager to improve regional stability and competitiveness through regional and sub-regional cooperation frameworks. BIMSTEC and MGC are playing a crucial role in this regard especially in the areas of trade, investment and tourism. Thailand has recently published a report on Millennium Development Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development. This goal principally seeks the developed donor countries to set targets for increased Official

Development Assistance (ODA), facilitating access to goods and services from developing countries, and ensuring access for developing countries to technology and essential drugs.

Thailand and India are expected to sign a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) by the end of 2011. It will give a boost to the bilateral trade and expected to cross \$6.5 billion this fiscal. Thailand deputy minister of commerce, Mr. Ponlaboot also said both sides should work together to conclude an India-BIMSTEC FTA as quickly as possible. The BIMSTEC agreement would create employment opportunities in both countries. "So the BIMSTEC FTA will be one of the first priorities of the Thai policies," he added. Mr. Ponlaboot further said that the Thai companies would like to participate in India's infrastructure projects and development of the northeastern region of the country.

#### **(b) Cambodia**

Cambodian government is committed to establish the Cambodia Telecom (CT), rehabilitate and extend customer telephone networks of Phnom Penh to the member countries and construction of a microwave link. The goals are to provide adequate network capacity and coverage of at least one line per 100 people to fully cover Phnom Penh, Sihanouk Ville and Siem Reap and to expand services to the urban areas of the other provincial towns. Other activities include preparation and enactment of a Telecommunications Act to provide the legal framework for the industry.

In the road sector, Cambodia's first priority is the rehabilitation of the road network and strengthening of its operations and maintenance capabilities. A significant bottleneck in the rehabilitation of the road network is the large number of river crossings. Many existing bridges have loading capacities below 20 tonnes and collapses are not infrequent. The Road Master Plan has three main objectives:

- i. To rehabilitate and reconstruct the main national roads, thereby improving land transport throughout the nation;
- ii. To build road links to neighboring countries, so as to opening up some of the remote areas of the country to international trade and tourism;

- iii. To develop a sustainable road maintenance program, thereby assuring that investment in road rehabilitation and reconstruction generate sustainable benefits.

Decisions about the pace and scope of hydropower development will be taken within a framework that carefully examines the costs and benefits of this development. The first step is to conduct feasibility studies of the potential sites. Further support from donors is being sought to formulate technically sound and economically optimal multipurpose projects, and to strengthen program's capacity for these activities. In addition to the rehabilitation of the Kirirom 12 megawatts project that is now in progress, a feasibility study of the Kamchay hydropower project in southern Cambodia with an installed capacity of around 120 megawatts is currently being conducted. A number of small-scale hydropower projects are also being considered as priorities for local supply, such as Stung Battambang (60 megawatts), Prek Thnot, Stung Chinit and Sambo project. The total potential of the Mekong tributaries is estimated, with minimum risks to the environment, at 2,200 megawatts, with a further 1,000 megawatts from rivers outside the Mekong Basin.

### **(c) Myanmar**

Myanmar is situated in Southeast Asia and it is the member of numerous multilateral frameworks such as Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, BIMSTEC, ASEAN, BIMSTEC, Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Forum (BCIM). BIMSTEC and Mekong-Ganga cooperation provide not only the link between South Asia and Southeast Asia, but also both of these frameworks have been emerging as important economic bloc in Asia. BIMSTEC's and MGC's objectives are to create an economic and social prosperity based on equality, besides the enhancement of mutual benefits in economic, social and technological aspects in the entire region. The better transportation system will lead to regional economic development of amity and unity among the people. In this context, the priority is given to the construction of roads and transport facilities.

The governments of the BIMSTEC grouping have to provide the needed physical infrastructure such as roads, railways, airports and runways, ports, bridges,

telecommunication, etc in order to facilitate the movement of goods and people. The Myanmar government has laid down a transport policy to support easier communication and transportation among states, to promote import and export of goods by lowering the duties thus supporting the economic development of the neighbouring countries, and to carry out durability of highways and to supervise the tariff and use of the highways. The Ministry of Construction is carrying the task of building the road networks. The Yangon-Mandalay Highways, which is the main commercial link, is being upgraded from double-lane to six-lane highway. This is Myanmar's significant contribution to the regional cooperation with neighbouring countries covered under BIMSTEC and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation frameworks.

The railway link between Kalay and Tamu (135 km) has been identified by the Myanmar Railways as a priority for connectivity. The fact that the connection between Mandalay and Kalay has been completed in January 2007 is quite encouraging. This route possibly has more potential and could form a corridor between India and China. However, it is dependent on the Indian side that is supposed to complete its share of rail lines and it seems little difficult to be completed considering that the Indian Railways may have other Priorities. Indeed, it is noted that this link is missing from their published development plan. The issue of connectivity with Thailand is more of a concern. Also, the high cost involved in developing the link due to the mountainous terrain is a major problem. Such developments require a significant traffic flow to retain the construction cost followed by profit making. A recent international feasibility study indicated that the Three Pagoda Pass route was uneconomical, mainly due to the high construction cost and lack of identified traffic. It is not clear whether the alternative more southern route would be any cheaper and could command the necessary levels of demand, possibly in connection with the development of Dawei or another deep water port for handling Thai transit traffic. Indo-Myanmar Friendship Road has been strengthened with the formation of the BIMSTEC, bringing together littoral and mainland states of the Bay of Bengal to promote regional cooperation



## **(b) Laos**

The Laos is one of the poorest countries in the Southeast Asia. The Infrastructure development in Laos especially transportation and communication, has always been a priority sector of the country. According to the Laos Expenditure and Consumption Survey (LECS 2), 17 per cent of the population lives in areas where infrastructure is particularly scarce. The National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) indicate that the continuation of transportation system improvement in Lao PDR is fundamental in supporting economic growth and realizing the goals and objectives outlined in the NGPES. While considerable progress has been made over the past decade in extending and upgrading the system, there are still many areas that are remote and isolated.

Laos is constantly engaged with various multilateral frameworks like ASEAN, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation. Both are working for and investing in huge money in the development program of Laos especially programmes related to poverty reduction and infrastructure development. Lao PDR has shown consistent improvement in the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI), being ranked 141st out of 173 countries in 1993, and climbing to 122nd by 2010.

While Lao PDR has made improvements in several areas and is on track to achieve some MDGs, there are bigger concerns about the sustainability of MDG gains, given the country's reliance on Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). Effective coordination both within the United Nations system and among donors in the Lao PDR has been a key achievement of UNDP. Alignment of external aid with the Government's five yearly MDG-based National Socio-Economic Development Plan and development priorities and capacity building for ODA management has been undertaken through the Round Table Process. At the October 2010 high-level Round Table Meeting the Government, UN and development partners signed an MDG Compact to reaffirm their commitment to achieving the MDGs.

In addition to the Millennium Development Goals, a localized MDG was introduced to reduce the impact of unexploded ordnance (UXO). In 2010 UNDP also supported the

Government to set up a UXO Trust Fund to manage and coordinate funds coming in to the UXO sector. The presence of UXO not only destroys lives but hinders the socio-economic development of the country. The correlation between poverty and UXO is clearly visible with 41 out of the 46 poorest districts are contaminated by UXO<sup>60</sup>.

Lao PDR plans to graduate from Least Developed Country status by 2020, meaning that it needs to ensure sustained and inclusive economic growth over the coming years. To this end, the government has prioritized the MDGs in its 7th National Socio- Economic Plan and is carrying out key interventions in such areas as basic education, healthcare, inequality, agriculture and rural and infrastructure development.

### **(c) Vietnam**

In Vietnam, the government has taken cooperation projects namely the construction of Politics and Public Administration School at a cost of USD 500,000, the gravity-fed-water facilities at Nam Ngan village (USD 30,000), That Luang (USD 10,000) and the Laos-Vietnam Friendship Cultural Hall (USD 1million). In the recent visit of the standing Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Somsavat Luengsavad, and Deputy Prime Minister of Vietnam, Mr. Nguyen Sinh Hung to the Luang Namtha province, the Governor of Luang Namtha, Mr. Phimmason Leuangkhamma informed the visiting guests that the economy of Luang Namtha province grew by 7.8% last year and the per capita income of the province was 4.4 million kip (USD 521).

### **Significant Projects undertaken under the aegis of MGC and BIMSTEC**

This region is needed to set up enormous infrastructure projects because frontiers areas can connect the entire Asia and that is why member countries have proposed various infrastructural projects multilaterally and bilaterally. This region is working on many infrastructural projects such as Trilateral Highway project, which was initially launched

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<sup>60</sup>World leaders had adopted MDG in 2000, set to be achieved by 2015. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide concrete, numerical benchmarks for tackling extreme poverty in its many dimensions. □□The MDGs also provide a framework for the entire international community to work together towards a common end – making sure that human development reaches everyone, everywhere. If these goals are achieved, half will cut world poverty, tens of millions of lives will be saved, and billions more people will have the opportunity to benefit from the global economy. (UNDP)

under the vestiges of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and later on incorporated into the transport sector of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC); but it has not yet fructified. The construction of the 1360 km highway at the cost of US\$700 million was distributed in three phases so as to connect Moreh (India), Mae Sot (Thailand) through Bagan in Myanmar. The inherent logic of the road was to fulfill the ambition of creating a 'link' between Northeast India and Southeast Asia<sup>61</sup>.

The project however faces many problems. Financial problems remain a contentious issue. India and Thailand have upgraded some of the link roads but due to financial scarcity in Myanmar, much work remains incomplete. Tensions have also flared due to Myanmar's demand for India and Thailand taking up the responsibility of bearing the costs of road construction in its territory.

Additionally, there are many debilitating security concerns in the region too. A well-documented aspect of India-Myanmar border is that it is plagued by numerous problems such as illegal trade, drug trafficking and insurgencies. Recent news updates elicited the demand for Indian forces to seal the border, in particular the stretch aligning Manipur, as outfits belonging to United Liberation Front of Manipur (ULFM) and United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) were regularly using the Friendship Road along the border to transport weapons through the national highway. Moreover, China has a de-facto control over Kachin state bordering the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which China persistently claims as its own.

It is also noticed that Chinese goods and illegal weapons are hampering the security interests of India. These concerns have always been present but the prospects of accruing long term benefits from the highway are substantial for India especially the strategic one, by gaining a foothold in its eastern flank. Therefore, the enthusiasm for the highway still prevails.

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<sup>61</sup> Patel, Tanvi (2010) India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway, New Delhi, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies

For India, however, the realization of the Trilateral Highway will bring a greater share of problems along with the benefits. The trilateral project raises concern on its final destination as well, i.e. the Myanmar-Thailand border where the ethnic insurgent camps are still in existence. Myanmar, in the past has accused Thailand of harboring groups like the Karen National Union and the Chin National Liberation Front. The cross border infrastructure has also been impeded due to Thailand's concern with the influx of illegal immigrants and the narcotics business.

In view of all these practical constraints on development of the Trilateral Highway, a deeper element of regionalism has to be taken into consideration as well. The quicker integration of Greater Mekong Sub region (GMS) has cast a shadow over other regional organizations like BIMSTEC and MGC. While cross border connectivity has grown at a superb rate among the MGC countries, it has effectively drowned the scope of projects like the Trilateral Highway as the Mekong region countries are being increasingly sucked into the economic vortex of China. Currently, MGC countries are concentrating on the upgradation and construction of new highways under the Asian Highway Project and already US\$2.7 billion have been invested to this effect. The East-West Corridor, the North-South Economic Corridor and the Southern Economic Corridor are the three major projects being implemented. The upgradation of these highways and ratification of Cross Border Transport Agreement (CBTA) have since quadrupled the intra-GMS trade. It is not a surprise that the Trilateral Highway initiative already crippled with political and financial problems has lost its charm.

The completion of the Trilateral Highway will forge greater connectivity between India and Southeast Asia and the positives will outweigh the negatives in every sense. Connectivity will bring its share of problems but will certainly open up avenues for cooperation with the neighboring states and provide effective mechanisms for dealing with cross border problems, which hitherto have remained unresolved. Additionally, the Trilateral Highway will connect India to the Asian Highway Network and trade between India and ASEAN will receive a further boost, which is already predicted to touch US\$100 billion in the next five years. It will also boost trade potential of India, Myanmar and Thailand that is largely carried out through sea routes at present, adding to the

substantial cost. Moreover, India's northeast region will be repositioned as a regional trading hub. It is evident that the Trilateral Highway is crucial for the realization of the Look East Policy and its failure might shake the very foundations of this quest upon which India has embarked.

Political and financial 'will' remains a key to rejuvenate this moribund project and India needs to strive to create this 'will'. In the event, this does not work; India could unilaterally shoulder the financial responsibility for the construction of highways. After all, US\$700 million does not seem to be much when India can shell out a billion dollar in aid to Afghanistan.

### **Historical linkages and the role of India's Soft Power**

Member countries invoke ancient cultural and religious linkages and their will to revive them. They refer as well to the feeling of acting for an "Asian community" that was present in the liberation movements and in the Non-Aligned Movement. Such political conjunction has certainly not been attained and does not seem to be achieved in the near future either. As part of the MGC cultural activities, India has granted US\$1 million for the establishment of a museum of traditional textiles in Siem Reap in Cambodia. However, the MGC countries are playing a relatively secondary role in the revival of Nalanda University in Bihar, unlike Singapore or Japan. Although the Vientiane Declaration placed emphasis on the performing arts, journalism and literature, health, and the conservation of heritage sites, cultural cooperation appears limited to a few projects and there is no broad framework visible.

Showing its commitment to the cooperation in the field of higher education, India offered 100 scholarships in 2003 and 300 fellowships in the IT sector. In addition, India sponsors English courses. But are a few scholarships here and there really going to transform educational systems and people-to-people relations? Again, cooperation is narrow, and wider options should be considered, such as setting up Burmese, Thai, Khmer or Vietnamese classes in India with the help of the MGCI countries, or developing a course on ancient South and Southeast Asian common cultural heritage. The tourism sector has seen nothing substantial but talks and meetings, however, an Expert

Working Group met in Bangkok on 29 May 2001 to discuss the modalities of the promotion of tourism in the region. Mention of a "Mekong-Ganga Tourism Investment Guide" was made as early as 2000, but it never saw the light of day. The Phnom Penh Road Map also talked of convening a reunion of Tourism Ministers in New Delhi in 2004 and taking part as a whole in the 2004 ASEAN Tourism Forum.

Promoting tourism requires an improvement in connectivity. While the MGCI falls far short of its objectives, some achievements have been made nevertheless. The MGCI's intentions concerning transport and communications consisted of two aspects: first, road networks, which implied collaboration in the Trans-Asian Highways, and second, rail connectivity. The India-Myanmar Tamu-Kalewa road was inaugurated in February 2001, followed by the East-West Corridor linking the Bay of Bengal to the South China Sea, a project finalized in December 2006. The South Corridor, linking Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, and the North-South Corridor, linking Kunming in Yunnan to Bangkok, should be completed around 2010-2011. As for rail connectivity, the feasibility study to link New Delhi with Hanoi has been completed, but construction has not yet begun.

Consequently, India's relations with the other MGCI countries still have great potential for development. In their necessary balancing of the two Asian giants, these countries place more trust on India than on China. But paradoxically, the impact of the MGCI is seen more in bilateral relations rather than in multilateral initiatives. Although the MGC's activity remains insubstantial, India's soft power projected in these countries generates larger diplomatic gains. For instance, India's extensive IT cooperation with Vietnam wins in return Vietnam's support for India's claim for a permanent UNSC seat. Perhaps this is why, in January 2007, India's Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahmed, labeled the MGC a "pillar of India's Look East policy."

### **Impact of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's 2010 Visit of Southeast Asia**

The Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had embarked on a journey to Japan, Malaysia and Vietnam from 24-30 October 2010. The Prime Minister's visit is to reiterate India's commitment to further strengthen multifaceted bilateral and multilateral relation with the Southeast Asian countries. The highlights of that visit were agreements

on economic cooperation, integration in terms of infrastructure development, information technology, biotechnology, defense, railways, energy cooperation and greater people-to-people contacts. The Indian Prime Minister also discussed bilateral ties with Vietnamese leaders. Both India and Vietnam had already approved setting up of a joint committee to strengthen their cooperation in the trade, investment and agricultural production sectors earlier in 2010. India has extended support to Vietnam to enhance and upgrade its capabilities in the defense sector and to help Vietnam to train forces for maintaining international peace and stability. Vietnam, on the other hand, will provide assistance in the repair and maintenance of Indian naval ships.

India is determined to revive and deepen its regional engagement through the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation initiative and with other regional schemes such as BIMSTEC, as well as initiate more cooperation with the ADB, World Bank, and IMF that will help in providing assistance in facilitating trade and promoting development in the region. Meanwhile, it is too early to say what negotiations and agreements will be finalized and how these negotiations will boost trade ties between the regions and benefit India. However, at the political level, India intends to gain more support for its candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council and to create a framework to mark 20 years of ASEAN-India Dialogue during the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in 2012 in New Delhi.

CHAPTER: IV

**Complementing ASEAN**



## CHAPTER: IV

### Complementing ASEAN

ASEAN and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, both are the major multilateral platform to connect both the sub-regions. ASEAN has been the major driving force in the Southeast Asian regionalism, which is also known as one of the most successful and the central regional organizations in the Southeast Asian matrix of multilateralism. The efforts to deepen the relationship with both the sub-regions were started with the adoption of India's multifold Look East Policy, which was the epoch-making change in India's foreign policy towards the Southeast Asia region<sup>62</sup>. India's own internal economic reform has also made this region important once again for their vibrant economic activities. ASEAN was the major platform to deepen India's multilateral ambition and the only framework to connect both the sub regions, for a long time. In the recent times many other frameworks have also emerged to engage both the sub regions but ASEAN still remains the central regional framework to pursue India's multilateral ambition in this region<sup>63</sup>.

In the backdrop of the emergence of ASEAN in August 1967, it has, for a long, been the only official Organization that pursued regional economic integration in entire East Asia. Now, ASEAN is engaged with several economic integration initiatives in East Asia including the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA), ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS) and the ASEAN Investment Area (AIA). These are the part of the ASEAN vision 2020; which aims to establish a more integrated community in the region by 2020. ASEAN is trying to achieve a free flow of goods, investment, services and a reduction in poverty and socio-economic disparity within the region.<sup>64</sup> It hopes to develop

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<sup>62</sup> Look East Policy is the multidimensional policy of the India towards the Southeast Asia region, which was adopted in the decade of 1990 under the PV NarsimhaRao government. The policy initially was begun with economic motivation but India had understood the importance of the political and strategic dimensions in the earliest phase of the policy.

<sup>63</sup> Swaran, Singh (2001) *China Factor in India's Ties with Southeast Asia*: in Frederic Grare and Amitabh Mattoo (ed.), *India and ASEAN: the politics of India's look east policy*, New Delhi: Manohar Publication, p199

<sup>64</sup> Rahul Sen(2006), "New Regionalism in Asia: A Comparative Analysis of Emerging Regional and Bilateral Trading Agreements Involving ASEAN, China and India," *Journal of World Trade*,(40)4 pp. 553-596

into a single market and production base by 2020<sup>65</sup>. Following are the three pillars of ASEAN:

- ASEAN Security Community
- ASEAN Economic Community
- ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community

In the backdrop of the brief history of the regional associations, the formation of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is one of the most significant events in the Southeast Asian region. The objective of the formation was twofold. First, it was a means to promote peace and stability in the region. At that same time, another motivation for the formation was to contain the spread of communism to Southeast Asian Countries. China then openly adopted a policy to export revolutions to Southeast Asia and had supported a number of local insurgency movements that was led by the communist parties in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. These were the major circumstances existing at that point of time, which provided a background for the requirement of multilateral cooperation among the regional countries<sup>66</sup>.

In this regard, ASEAN was not the first regional grouping, which was created to act as a forum for dialogues between leaders of the various countries. The Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), comprising the Federation of Malaya, the Philippines and Thailand, was formed in 1961 that was the beginning of the multilateral cooperation within the region. However, the organization became defunct one year later, after the Sabah dispute between the Federation of Malaya and the Philippines. Meanwhile, the diplomatic ties between Kuala Lumpur and Manila were severed during 1962–66<sup>67</sup>. The confrontation launched by Indonesia's late President Sukarno also led to the demise of Malphilindo, which included Indonesia, the Federation of Malaya and the Philippines<sup>68</sup>. Former Philippine President Macapagal had mooted the concept of Malphilindo. The political stability of Malaya (then a collective name for Singapore and the Federation of

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<sup>65</sup>MohitAnand (2009) India –ASEAN relation: Analyzing Regional Implications, *"IPCS Special"* 2009(27) 10-14

<sup>66</sup>Thomas, Nicholas (2009) *Governance and regionalism in Asia*, London: Taylor & Francis, 2009 - *Political Science* - 342 pages

<sup>67</sup>Lim Chong Yah (2004) *Southeast Asia-The Long Road Ahead*, World Scientific Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

Malaya) was threatened by the militancy of the Communists. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007 claims and strives to transform Southeast Asia into a more democratic community. The adoption of ASEAN's new charter, in particular is a step to improve the gaps and foster equality among its members.

### **ASEAN and India's Look East Policy**

The ASEAN is a landmark effort in the Asian regionalism and it has become one of the most successful regional organizations among the developing countries. The ASEAN-India relationship has made great strides since the adoption of the Look East Policy. India- ASEAN bilateral cooperation began in the economic realm in 1992, but quickly realizing the importance of the region it included the political and security dimensions too. India was accorded full ASEAN Dialogue Partner status in 1995.<sup>69</sup> India then became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996 and the East Asian Summit (EAS) in 2005, and signed on the Treaty of Amity of Cooperation in 2003. New Delhi has also inked FTAs with Singapore and Indonesia in 2005 and 2011 respectively. In between these two developments, New Delhi signed an FTA with ASEAN in 2009. Very recently, it has signed The Comprehensive Economic Preferential Agreement (CEPA) with Malaysia in 2011.

Both the sub-regions are also well-connected and pursuing good relationship with the sub-regional initiatives like the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectorial Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

ASEAN and India have also concluded an ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA) in Goods. India's External Affairs Minister, Mr. S. M. Krishna during his inaugural address at the recent India-ASEAN Delhi Dialogue III, said: "It has been a gratifying engagement for us, an engagement which has drawn strength from India's rapidly developing bilateral ties with individual ASEAN countries, and from our millennia-old bonds with the countries and civilizations of the region."

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid

It is noticeable that Southeast Asian states have founded most of the Asian regional organizations. The entire Southeast Asia has adopted the ASEAN process, which is called the "ASEAN Way".<sup>70</sup> This process emphasizes on the consultation and consensus, non-interference in members' internal affairs and voluntary enforcement of regional decisions has characterized these bodies, insuring at bottom that they reinforce Sovereignty protection.

Nevertheless, ASEAN's expansion in the 1990's by including Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia, all four affected by internal instabilities, was seen by several of the association's original members as undermining its international stature. Additionally, coping with terrorism in the new century has also led to some erosion as far as the non-interference norm is concerned. Transnational cooperation is now essential to each nation's security because egregious human rights practices in anycountry, besides, the terrorist activities across national borders can cause refugee problems into the neighboring countries.

ASEAN's new Charter constitutes an effort to move beyond sovereignty protection and establish economic, security and socio-cultural communities by 2020. The Charter also commits its signatories to the preservation of democracy and human rights. Other regional organizations dominated by ASEAN procedures include the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) for security discussions, ASEAN+3 (Japan, South Korea and China) for economic matters, and the East Asian Summit (EAS), which added Australia, New Zealand and India to the ASEAN+3. Dialogues in these groups cover the gamut of Asian international relations. Perhaps their greatest utility is that these forums provideopportunities for national leaders to discuss pressing issues on the sidelines of these gatherings.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>The ASEAN way can be back when the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation was signed in Southeast Asia. The Fundamental principles of the ASEAN way is namely non-interference, informality, minimal institutionalization, consultation and consensus, non-use of force and non-confrontation constituted these are fundamental principal called the ASEAN Way. The process of consultations and consensus is a democratic approach of the decision making in the organization process.

<sup>71</sup>Thomas, Nicholas (2009) Governance and regionalism in Asia Taylor & Francis, 2009 - Political Science - 342 pages

**Map No: 4 - The map of the ASEAN countries**



Source: <http://www.asean.org/69.html>

### **Role of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and ASEAN in the Regional Development**

It is very necessary, before addressing the role of ASEAN in the regional development, which complements the other framework of connecting both the sub-regions especially to the Mekong–Ganga Cooperation in various ways in the regional development. Every member of MGC, except India is also the member of ASEAN and that is why the interest of India and requirements of the sub-regional development are inextricably linked with the ASEAN.

ASEAN is the father of the entire existing multilateral framework. As far as India is concerned, ASEAN is playing an important role in the regional development and resolving the regional dispute with the process of ASEAN WAY, which is more close to

India's democratic norms of establishing the multilateral and bilateral relations with the neighbouring countries.

It is also essential to articulate the role of the region as a whole from the geo-economic point of view. The region is experiencing a vibrant economic transformation. Simultaneously, China is another pillar and prominent actor in the economic multilateralism in this region. China has become prominent source of FDI and a huge investor in these regional projects. It is also commendable that India is also trying to bring Southeast Asia under its economic radar. India wants to attract FDI from the Southeast Asian countries, investment in the entire sub-region especially in the frontier areas, which is almost untouched from the development. In this regard, the ASEAN proved tremendously beneficial for helping the Mekong-Ganga project, which is very crucial for the development of the sub-regional economic and cultural cooperation. Both the frameworks are complementing each other in many ways.

### **Role in the economic development of the region**

The entire Asia Pacific is constantly transforming as major hub of the economic activities. Every major country wants to engage with the Southeast Asian countries bilaterally and multilaterally as well. As a matter of fact, the sub-regional trade has tremendously increased in the recent time with India becoming a major part of this change.

#### **a. Establishing the FTAs and CEPAs with the regional countries**

With more emphasis on the sub-regional interests, both the sub-regions have also sought to increase trade through various incentives. For instance, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation helps India to increase its trade and continues to explore deeper integration under the 'second phase' of its 'Look East' policy. India is continuously strengthening its multilateral and bilateral ties with the regional countries. India has signed various FTAs with Philippines, Malaysia, and Japan.

In 2004, India began to look beyond ASEAN, aggressively pursuing additional East Asian Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs). India's RTA efforts include the East Asian Summit (EAS), Bangkok Agreement, and the Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD).

In 2004, India began to look beyond ASEAN, aggressively pursuing additional East Asian Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs). India's RTA efforts include the East Asian Summit (EAS), Bangkok Agreement, and the Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD). The most often cited impetus for cooperation is converging economic interests. ASEAN and India are both significant markets in the world economy. At the same time, when the ASEAN India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA) was inked in August 2009, both had a combined consumer market of almost 1.8 billion people and a combined GDP of US\$2.75trillion. Recently India signed the FTA with Indonesia and CEPA with Malaysia. This process enhances the capability of the CLMV countries, which are the members of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and make them economically more vibrant to achieve their developmental goal.

**Table: 5:Sub-regional relation development Calender 1990-2011**

YEAR	Event/Agreement
1992	Sectoral Dialogue Partnership of ASEAN
1995	Full Dialogue Partnership of ASEAN
1996	Membership in ASEAN Regional Forum
1997	Establishment of BIMSTEC
2000	Mekong Ganga Cooperation Initiative begins
2002	First India-ASEAN Summit and India-ASEAN Business Summit
2003	Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation
2003	India signs Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
2003	ASEAN India Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism
2004	ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity
2005	India becomes member of East Asian Summit
2009	Signing of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement(AIFTA)
2011	FTA with Indonesia and CEPA with Malysia

**a. Trade and Commerce**

ASEAN and India are rapidly increasing their trade and commerce that is expected totouch the target of more than US\$ 60 billion. India and ASEAN have signed the ASEAN- India Trade in Goods Agreement at the ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting. In view of the Trade in Goods Agreement, India and ASEAN agreed to revise bilateral trade target to US\$70 billion to be achieved in the next two years, noting that the initial target of US\$50 billion set in 2007 has been surpassed. The efforts to enhance the trade in



the sub-region through the ASEAN also motivate other multilateral frameworks to improve their capability as well.

In order to strengthen business networks and opportunities India and ASEAN also encouraged the re-activation of the ASEAN-India Business Council and the ASEAN-India Business Summits. In this regard, proposal has received a positive response from both sides of the business community.

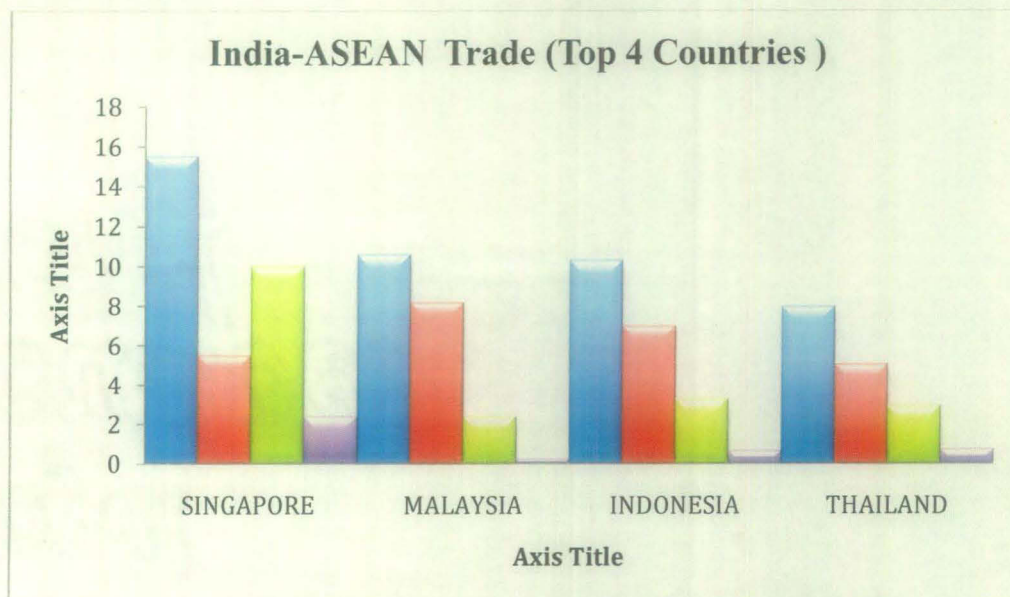
India's northeast region has an abundance of natural resources but unfortunately; this region is economically very backward. The harsh terrain makes it very difficult to achieve progress in the whole region with the national government's efforts only. Nevertheless, the government is trying to attain this goal in the form of substantial investments in infrastructure development, construction of roads, bridges and communication networks along with the harnessing of region's vast natural resources that will facilitate trade and economic progress.

**a. Helping in the Mekong-Ganga Project in North east**

FTA between India and the ASEAN will pave the way for economic prosperity of the northeast and can also mark an end to the region's alienation in its own country. The time has come to think of the borders with a new vision by enhancing trade relations with Southeast Asia.

**Table No.6: INDIA-ASEAN TRADE AND FDI-2010**

Source: Ministry of Trade and Commerce (All data are in US \$ billion)



With the impending FTA, India's northeast has suddenly grabbed the attention in the regional dynamics. In spite of its vast natural resources and its strategic position as a link between India and Southeast and East Asian countries, this region has been lagging far behind than other Indian states in many respects. Thus, looking into the political, strategic and economic dimensions of the policy of India towards the ASEAN and East Asia, it can be a golden opportunity for the northeast in the long run to solve the ongoing political and economic problems.

**b. Complementing each other in containing Separatism and Terrorism**

Both the frameworks has showed commitment to cooperate in tackling the trans-border issues and global challenges such as terrorism, transnational crimes, especially in the areas of drug trafficking, food and energy security, natural disasters, new and emerging infectious diseases and climate change. ASEAN also encourages India to undertake activities to implement the Joint Declaration on Cooperation to Combat Terrorism. ASEAN and India can cooperate in their fight against terrorism by sharing intelligence inputs and technologies as enshrined in the 2003 ASEAN-India Joint Declaration on Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism.

India also has particular concern about its border with Myanmar where separatist groups are campaigning against India. Groups like the Manipuri People's Liberation Front (MPLF) and the Assamese United Liberation Front (ULFA) have used northwestern Myanmar as their safe haven. The porous borders continue to serve as hub for smuggling, drug trafficking and insurgency, however, the United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP) and the International Narcotic Control Board (INCB) has been persistently warning that northeast India could become a major transit point for illicit drugs.

**c. Piracy and security of Sea Lanes of Communications**

India is trying to think strategically about long-term avenues for boosting cooperation beyond BIMSTEC and MGC. Since most of the future common challenges, which ASEAN and India will face ranging from the issues of climate change to piracy to China's naval buildup—have a strong maritime component, maritime security would be a good activity to start with. For instance, given the positive signals that littoral states along the Straits of Malacca have been giving off recently, as well as the terrorism that have faced New Delhi could consider taking an even more robust role in security along the waterway, particularly in terms of joint policing with neighboring countries.

**d. Complementing at the TRACK- II level**

The prime motive of the Mekong Ganga Cooperation is to accelerate the cultural linkages, enhance the people's mobility, and develop the better people to people relation and the promotion of the tourism. In this regard the progress of the ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations which has deepened and broadened over the past years and developed in to a multi-faceted and dynamic partnership contributing to regional peace, mutual understanding and closer economic interaction.

ASEAN appreciated India's continued efforts in promoting people-to-people contacts and mutual understanding through visit to India of students, members of the media and diplomats, which help to foster ASEAN-India relations at the people's level. As India is one of the world's largest democracies, India-ASEAN also encouraged the exchanges of

visits of ASEAN-India parliamentarians with the involvement of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly that would also promote democratic values.

India is also playing an active role in promoting human resource development as a means to narrow the development gap such as establishing Entrepreneur Development Centre's, Centre's for English Language Training and IT Training Centers in CLMV countries, which could also be extended to other ASEAN Member States.

The ASEAN is also emphasizing the importance of cooperation in Science and Technology and Environment as a vital factor to promote dynamic and sustainable development in the region. In this regard, we looked forward to the early operation of the ASEAN-India Science and Technology Fund and the ASEAN-India Green Fund in order to support cooperation in these areas. Considering recent natural calamities in the region, establishment of an India-ASEAN round table comprises with the think tanks, policy makers, scholars, and media and business representatives to provide policy inputs on future areas of cooperation.

**e. Infrastructure development**

ASEAN is promoting the connectivity among the sub-region by completing all the missing links between both the sub regions and also beyond the region through further integration of sea, road and rail links.

In this regard, The Cross border connectivity among both of the sub region is an important aspect in the sub regional cooperation. The development of the Connectivity brings countries together and acts as dispensable practices, which is harmonizing the frontier areas.

With the help of ASEAN, The development of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway is major infrastructure project, and most recently, her pledge to improve the 30-kilometer stretch from Thingannyinaung –Kawkareik which would form part of the westward link of the East -West Economic Corridor.

ASEAN-India Aviation Cooperation Framework at the 14<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Transport Ministers Meeting in November 2008 which would lay the foundation for closer aviation cooperation and open skies, to support business growth, tourism and greater interactions between both the people. In this regard ASEAN-India Air Transport Agreement is under discussion with the implementation timeline set for 2011.

These countries are also cooperating in the field of space technologies including sharing of satellite data for management of natural disaster and launching of small satellites and scientific instruments and payloads for experiments in remote sensing and communication for space agencies and academic institution.

#### **f. Disaster Management**

The sub-region has one of the most affected areas by the natural disaster in the world. Past few years back in this region suffered numerous cyclones and Tsunami. In this regard, ASEAN has also established some mechanism like ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster management (AHA Centre) to undertake operational coordination of activities. Since the signing of the AADMER agreement in 2005, ASEAN has put into place measures for standard operating procedures, training and capacity building, disaster information sharing, communication network, and rapid assessment team.

Tsunami and Cyclone Nargis which affected India, Thailand, Indonesia and Myanmar last few years became a test bed for ASEAN coordinating mechanism and its role as the humanitarian bridge between the international community and the affected population<sup>72</sup>.

An interesting feature in ASEAN evolution of disaster management was the acceptance by member states for the utilization of military together with civilian personnel in disaster relief. The establishment of a center to coordinate regional disaster response was also agreed upon and is now ongoing. The ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) that was signed by the member countries in July 2005 in Vientiane, Lao PDR, established the mechanisms for achieving substantial disaster

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<sup>72</sup>Governance and regionalism in Asia Nicholas Thomas Taylor & Francis, 2009 - Political Science - 342 pages

risks reduction and emergency response. The salient feature of this accord is that the agreed framework for disaster risk reduction is based on the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005 -2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters.

ASEAN conducts annual disaster simulation exercises to enhance the capacities and capabilities of member countries in joint disaster management operations. These simulation exercises organized in conjunction with contingency planning workshops facilitated the implementation of the AADMER and also the development of the ASEAN Standby Arrangements and Standard Procedures (SASOP) for regional disaster management.

The logical progression in its evolution apparently is broadening regional cooperation in disaster management and this is borne in the agenda of the fourth East Asia Summit (EAS) held in Hua Hin, Thailand.

**g. Helping to engage other Financial and Regional Organization**

In the recent time, the ASAEAN emerged as a strong actor in the international arena with representing entire Southeast Asia. ASEAN is also helping India at international level. It is also trying to establish the coordination among the developing countries and developed countries. The ASEAN Leaders suggested that India as a member of G-20 can play an important role in coordinating efforts between developed and emerging economies to mitigate the negative impact of the current global economic and financial crisis.

ASEAN platform attracts the attention of the major financial organizations like IMF, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank these are the organization financing the local infrastructural projects, where ASEAN is proving as a bridge to coordinate these organizations. ASEAN is also helping India to complement the global efforts in the reform of the international financial architecture and accelerate the early recovery of the global economy. India welcomed ASEAN participation at the London and Pittsburg G20

Summits and expressed its support for the continued participation of ASEAN Chair and Secretary-General of ASEAN at G20 Summit.

Moreover, ironically, at the very time India has gained significant interaction in ASEAN and other East Asian forums, those venues are being overshadowed by larger, and some would say ominous, regional developments. ASEAN, ARF, ASEAN+3, the EAS and even APEC are no longer the only games in town – if they ever were.

#### **h. Democratic Solution in the Myanmar**

Myanmar is the unstable and closed country in the Southeast Asia, has a severe impact of rule of the military JUNTA in the stability of the region. ASEAN is constantly trying to cope up with these problems and trying to find a solution without interrupting the internal policy of the Myanmar. These are the processes of dealing the problems, called the norm of the ASEAN's way of consultation and consensus. ASEAN plays a very important role in the neutralizing the aggressive policy of the ASEAN and start the almost closed democratic process, it resulted in the recent election of the Myanmar<sup>73</sup>. The neutralization of Myanmar of JUNTA government has a very important for the regional security of the sub region especially in the frontier areas. In this regard ASEAN Myanmar is proving to compliment in the Mekong-Ganga sub regional multilateral plan of action, where the frontier areas are the major area of focus in the sub regional development.

Undoubtedly the ASEAN is the engine of the Southeast Asian regionalism. In addition to developing strong relationship and cultural linkages, the idea of Mekong-Ganga cooperation is contributing to the development and establishment of the road and infrastructural linkages, tourism and the educational fields. The ASEAN has welcomed the MGC initiative as it complements to its own initiative helps and deepen the process of integration in the Southeast Asian region. As the matter of fact that, all the Mekong-Ganga meeting has developed under the umbrella of ASEAN, otherwise it took the much more time for the fruition and the noteworthy development of sub regional process among both of the sub region.

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid

India is much aware about the emergence of geo-economical equations of the region. India want to show its more and more presence in the region that's why India need to form more matrix of mechanism of the multilateral framework, such like a Mekong Ganga Cooperation it is helping not the development of the sub region, It also deepens the amity and also carve a new picture of the India's diplomatic interest in entire East Asia. Regarding ASEAN India's ex-Prime Minster Mr. Atal Bihari Vajapaaee stated that "I put an idea that ASEAN need to be more closely integrated with India, China, Japan and Korea. As an economic community including the ASEAN+3+1, would more effectively exploit the economic synergies."

Improved relations between India and Southeast Asia, has started the new era of converging the interest of both of sub region the in long-term. The main reason for this is that both of the sub-regions are rapidly economically transforming. Obviously, India is economically politically as well as militarily in a state of flux in this region. Southeast Asian countries are trying to build their economy and searching a strong economic partner similar to the China.

In the ongoing decade, India can further build upon these improved relations, which is beneficial for both ASEAN and India. It can show ASEAN that it is their ally and has a vested interest in the peaceful development of the region. Both of the sub region shares common values of protecting sea trade, peaceful settlement of disputes, and economic development. India in order to assure its role in the region must move to further cement ties with the ASEAN members.<sup>74</sup>

The strategic role of India has to be expanded in conjunction with the regional countries. India should encourage joint patrolling of the Straits of Malacca, stricter anti-piracy laws and promote economic exchange. It has been speculated that Singapore may be able to play a vital role in India's continuing economic liberalization by generating capital, and in general playing a role analogous to that of Hong Kong for China in the late 80's to early 90's. It has to show ASEAN that it is a viable alternative to the more traditional players in

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid



the region. Lastly, it must prove that India is willing to provide a counterbalance in the region, should the situation in the future call for it.

In conclusion as India looks to its future in Southeast Asia which tremendously depend on the progress of the multilateralism among both the sub region with deep integrated cooperation.

## **CHAPTER: V**

### **Conclusion**

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### Conclusion

Mekong Ganga Cooperation was an important initiative to work as a bridge between South and Southeast Asia. India and Southeast Asia are the finest example of vibrant cultural relations and deep-rooted historical connectivity. The cultural similarities between both regions suggest that they are the two sides of the same coin. Southeast Asia has had an extensive cultural influence of India, Srivijaya in Sumatra and the Majapahit in Java, Bali and the Philippine archipelago were much influenced by the Indian civilizations.

Indian influence is still visible today in Southeast Asian region in the area of food, pop culture, language and religion. These tremendous old historical, geographical linkages and cultural homogeneity is constructing a different political perception in the Southeast Asian region than any other nation. India initially was a champion of decolonization in Southeast Asia during the 1950s and 1960s through the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) but after the 1991 it adopted the policy of Look East and attached the prime importance to Southeast Asia in foreign policy matters.

India and Southeast Asia have been more interdependent than ever before in the age of Globalization. The rapid transformation of Asia-pacific region as a new engine of economic growth has helped it for constructing it's a new political and economic identity.

APEC, ASEAN, MGC, EAS, ARF, ASEAN+3 and GMC are also the major multilateral framework in regional matrix of multilateral arrangements that have an equal importance. Those are playing a vital and constructive role in the region and also constructing a new identity of the region in the global Geo-economic sphere.

As far as India is concerned, this dissertation is devoted to analyze the grounds that have connected both the sub-regions in the new web of regionalism. In this regard Mekong Ganga Cooperation is the prominent multilateral framework. This is connecting India to the entire CLMV countries and Thailand without the hurdles ridden SAARC and India's externally slow process to the multilateral engagement with the ASEAN. Mekong Ganga

cooperation is pursuing the second phase of the India's look east policy. India's cultural influence in the region constructs a platform for the people to people interaction among the sub-region. In this regard Mekong Ganga Cooperation proves as a game changer in both of sub-regional. The projects are evolving which requires the support of political connectivity beyond the ASEAN.

The Mekong Ganga Cooperation has revitalized the importance of the soft power like culture, economy once again in the web of new regionalism, which emerged after the 1990s, which is more influential with the Globalization. Whether Southeast Asia is becoming dynamic economies of the world where Singapore and Malaysia are called the new tigers but CLMV countries are still comparatively more poor and backward. They are grappling with tremendous infrastructural problems, poverty and unemployment.

The Mekong-Ganga region has been world's most fertile as far as agriculture is concerned, which also has strategic importance. Mekong-Ganga Cooperation is playing a constructive role in the background, which has directly impacted to the people. For instance Asian Highway Project can change the face of the entire region; tourism being the most profiteering sector can change the geodynamics of people of entire region.

In the backdrop of Southeast Asian regionalism, India and China are most prominent actors. India seems to be more reactive to the Chinese initiative, which is more economically influential than India in the region. China and ASEAN signed world largest FTA covering more than 1.75 billion people. On the other hand, India's initiatives not only have economic implication but also it has long-term strategic implications.

India is aware about the emergence of geo-economical equations of the region India wants to show its more and more presence in the region that's why India needs to form more matrix of mechanism of the multilateral framework, such like a Mekong-Ganga Cooperation. It is helping not only the development of the region, and promoting the amity and also carving a new picture of the India's diplomatic foresight in the entire East Asia. Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpai on the eve of the India –ASEAN Summit said in 2002 "I put forward an idea that India need to be more closely integrated with ASEAN, china and Japan and Korea. As an economic community including the

ASEAN+3+1 would be more formidable and effective exploit the economic synergies of the region.”

To conclude it can be stated that although Mekong-Ganga Cooperation agreement which was established to promote the connection in the economic, social and cultural areas has yet to make substantial progress to be counted as a successful venture in the region.

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## VIENTIANE DECLARATION ON MEKONG-GANGA COOPERATION

We, the Ministers of Cambodia, India, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, met in Vientiane on November 10, 2000 to discuss the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation initiatives announced by the foreign ministers of the six countries in Bangkok on July 28, 2000 on the occasion of the AMM/PMC Meeting.

IN KEEPING with the spirit of existing framework of cooperation in the region,

DETERMINED to promote common heritage through greater cooperation,

INSPIRED by a common desire to develop closer relations and better understanding among the six countries to enhance friendship, solidarity, and cooperation,

DESIROUS of promoting the mutual benefit of the people of Cambodia, India, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam through multi-faceted cooperation in the areas of Tourism, Culture, Education and Communication,

INSPIRED by a common desire to strengthen friendship and mutual understanding under the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), and

Having considered the concept paper prepared by our Senior Officials in their meeting during 8-9 November 2000

Do hereby declare that :

We shall endeavour to strengthen our cooperation aimed at achieving the objectives of the cooperation framework by encouraging and facilitating the implementation of the following activities in accordance with the concept paper annexed to this Declaration.

### I. TOURISM

1. Conduct strategic studies for joint marketing and convening of top level tourism marketing missions to promote the MGC;
2. Launch the Mekong-Ganga Tourism Investment Guide;



3. Establish networks among tourism training institutions, and conduct seminars in tourism promotion;
4. Facilitate the travel of people in the region;
5. Arrange and facilitate easy access to necessary information about existing cultural heritage sites in MGC countries;
6. Expand multi-modal communication and transportation linkages among member countries to encourage travel and tourism in the region;
7. Promote package tours to famous cultural, religious and eco-tourism sites of the MGC countries.

## II. CULTURE

1. Promote joint research in the dance, music and theatrical forms and traditions of the MGC countries;
2. Organise round tables for journalists, writers and experts in literature, performing arts, women's empowerment, health, nutrition, etc..for the service of tourism;
3. Exert common efforts to expand the export market for the handicrafts and traditional textiles of the MGC countries;
4. Set up a clear programme of conservation and preservation of old manuscripts amongst the member countries;
5. Conserve, preserve, and protect heritage sites and artefacts in MGC countries;
6. Exert joint efforts to identify and conduct campaigns for the inclusion of important heritage sites in the region in UNESCO World Heritage list;
7. Set up information network and exchange in performing arts, traditional rites, rituals, and festivals among the member countries.

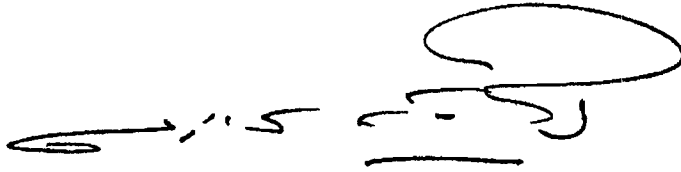
### III Education

1. Promote the exchange students and faculty between recognised technology and management institutions in MGC countries and provide MGC scholarships for outstanding students in specific subjects;
2. Encourage the establishment of networking and twinning arrangements among MGC universities; particularly in the areas of social sciences, humanities, engineering and area studies;
3. Participate in book fairs in member countries on a commercial basis;
4. Promote programmes in specific subjects including for the teaching of the languages of MGC countries;
5. Translate the classics of the MGC countries into the languages of the MGC countries in cooperation with the existing ASEAN programme;
6. Seek financial support for research work on economic, historical and cultural themes of relevance of tourism to two or more MGC countries.

### IV TRANSPORT & COMMUNICATION

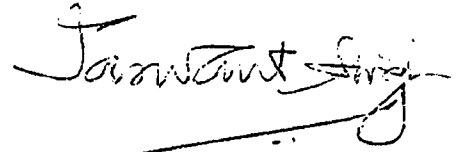
1. Deploy efforts to develop transportation networks in the region in particular the EAST-WEST Corridor project and the Trans-Asian Highway;
2. Strengthen cooperation in the development of IT infrastructures and networks;
3. Promote cooperation in air services and linkages in the region.

For the Government of  
the Kingdom of Cambodia



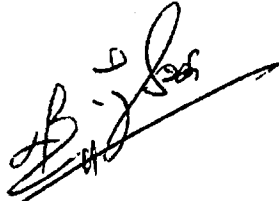
**VENG SEREYVUTH**  
Minister of Tourism

For the Government of India



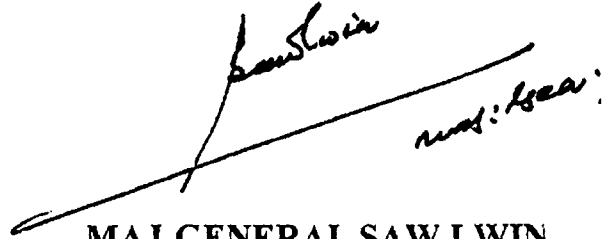
**JASWANT SINGH**  
Minister of External Affairs

For the Government of  
the Lao People's Democratic Republic



**SOMSAVAT LENGSAVAD**  
Deputy Prime Minister  
Minister of Foreign Affairs

For the Government of  
the Union of Myanmar



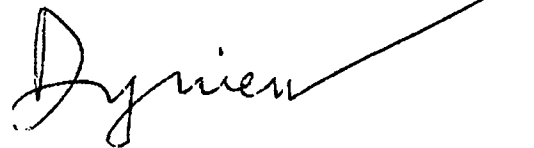
**MAJ-GENERAL SAW LWIN**  
Minister for Hotels and Tourism

For the Government of  
the Kingdom of Thailand



**ADISAI BODHARAMIK**  
Minister to the Prime Minister's Office

For the Government of  
the Socialist Republic of Vietnam



**NGUYEN DY NIEN**  
Minister of Foreign Affairs