

Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)

Background

The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) is an initiative by six countries – India and five ASEAN countries, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam for cooperation in tourism, culture, education, as well as transport and communications. It was launched in 2000 at Vientiane, Lao PDR. Both the Ganga and the Mekong are civilizational rivers, and the MGC initiative aims to facilitate closer contacts among the people inhabiting these two major river basins. The MGC is also indicative of the cultural and commercial linkages among the member countries of the MGC down the centuries.

Previous MGC Ministerial Meetings

2. The 1st MGC Ministerial Meeting was held in Vientiane from 9-13 November 2000. It issued the Vientiane Declaration on MGC covering cooperation in the 4 traditional areas. The 2nd MGC Ministerial Meeting was held in Hanoi on 28 July 2001, and adopted the Hanoi Programme of Action (HPA), a detailed Work Programme for six years (July 2001 to July 2007), providing specific actions for cooperation, in the 4 traditional areas. The 3rd MGC Ministerial Meeting was held in Phnom Penh on 20 June 2003 and provided additional political impetus to the MGC initiative. It adopted the Phnom Penh Roadmap.

3. On the margins of the ASEAN Summit in Cebu, the Philippines, in January 2007, Thailand, the then chairman of the MGC, handed over chairmanship to India on 12 January 2007. The 5th MGC Ministerial Meeting was held at Manila, Philippines on 1 August 2007, and was chaired by India. Thereafter, the MGC Ministerial Meetings remained pending for 5 years from 2007-2012.

4. India hosted the 6th MGC Ministerial Meeting on 4 September 2012, in New Delhi preceded by the MGC Senior Officials Meeting on 3 September 2012. The Meeting was chaired by the then EAM, Shri. S.M. Krishna, and saw active participation from all the MGC partner countries in which beyond the four existing traditional areas of cooperation, viz. tourism, culture, education, and transport & communications, our Ministers agreed to widen collaboration into newer areas, such as SME cooperation, conservation of Rice Germplasm, setting up a Working Group on Health, establishment of a Common Archival Resource Centre (CARC) at the Nalanda University, and finally, India–Cambodia Laos Myanmar Vietnam Quick Impact Projects.

5. The Ministers also noted the positive developments in India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway project and other ongoing cooperation under the India-ASEAN framework to realize India-ASEAN Connectivity. Keeping in view the significance of connectivity amongst the MGC countries, and its associated benefits, the Ministers agreed to expeditiously take forward matters related to the extension of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway to Cambodia and Lao PDR, and to the new proposal for the development of an India-Myanmar-Lao PDR-Viet Nam-Cambodia highway.

Seventh MGC Ministerial Meeting

6. The 7th MGC Ministerial Meeting was held in Vientiane on 24 July 2016 in a cordial atmosphere. Indian side was led by Gen. (Retd.) Dr. V. K. Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of other MGC countries were present at the meeting. A short film "The Power of Six" was screened on the most visible project of MGC viz. MGC Traditional Asian Textiles Museum built at Siam Reap, Cambodia emphasizing that it was a testimony to our cultural connect as well as modern connections.

7. MGC Ministerial Meeting was held after a gap of four years since 2012. New areas have since been added to the Work Programme such as cooperation in the field of SMEs, Rice Germplasm, health and pandemics, Nalanda University Archival Resource Centre and Quick Impact Projects. MGC cooperation has been expanding in the fields of trade, tourism, development, movement of people and goods.

Areas of Cooperation

8. India announced 50 new ITEC scholarships for MGC countries in areas of culture, tourism, engineering, management, teachers training, film directing, sound, lighting and stage management in addition to 900 scholarships already given every year. New Centres of excellence in Software Development and Training were announced. Existing capacity building programmes in law enforcement, financial markets, ICT and space, to supplement the requirements of MGC partners was also announced.

9. 3 Quick Impact Projects in Lao PDR and 2 in Myanmar are under consideration in addition to 9 in Cambodia and 5 in Vietnam already under implementation.

10. MGC partners were invited as 'Guests of Honour' in the 5th International Buddhist Conclave which was held from 2-5 October 2016 in Delhi, Varanasi and Sarnath. 275 persons from 39 countries including prominent Buddhist personalities from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam participated.

11. India drafted a Plan of Action (POA) 2016-18 which was endorsed to become the core guideline for future action. On the future direction of MGC, it was recommended that POA 2016-18 may be continued. ACCC+ India meeting is to be held in Surakarta, Indonesia in March 2017. It supported extension of trilateral highway to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Cooperation in tourism, particularly in tourism-marketing, exploring tourist destinations for outbound tourists was suggested.

Future Events

12. India will be hosting the 8th MGC Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) in New Delhi on 7 April 2017. The meeting is likely to discuss the progress of the Plan of Action proposed during the previous MGC SOM held in Vientiane, Lao PDR in July 2016. The meeting will also discuss the preparations for the forthcoming 8th MGC Ministerial Meeting likely to be held later this year. India will also be hosting a think tank Policy Dialogue on 'Stronger Connectivity, Enhancing Ties' for MGC countries in New Delhi on 8 April 2017 in association with ASEAN-India Center (AIC).

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