

## **Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)**

The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) is an initiative by six countries – India and five ASEAN countries, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam launched in 2000 at Vientiane, Lao PDR, for cooperation in tourism, culture, education, as well as transport and communications. 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 civilizational, cultural and commercial linkages among the member countries of the MGC down the centuries.

2. The 1<sup>st</sup> MGC Ministerial meeting took place in Vientiane from November 9-13, 2000. The meeting issued the Vientiane Declaration on MGC that covers cooperation in tourism, culture, education and transport and communications.

3. The 2<sup>nd</sup> MGC Ministerial Meeting held in Hanoi on July 28, 2001, adopted the Hanoi Programme of Action, a detailed Work Programme for six years (July 2001 to July 2007), providing specific actions for cooperation, in culture, tourism, human resource development/education, and transport and communications.

4. The 3<sup>rd</sup> MGC Ministerial Meeting was held in Phnom Penh on June 20, 2003. It provided additional political impetus to the MGC initiative. It adopted the Phnom Penh Roadmap for MGC. In the meeting the Ministers reviewed the progress of the implementation of the Hanoi Programme of Action for MGC. The Ministers reaffirmed their determination to seek ways and means to further promote cooperation among member countries with a view to enhancing socio-economic development. The Ministers agreed that MGC should continue to focus on the four priority areas of tourism, culture, education, and transport and communications in keeping with the Hanoi Programme of Action.

5. 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 January 12, 2007. As part of the cooperative activities that year, India hosted a delegation of about one hundred Buddhist pilgrims from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam from September 5-12, 2007.

6. The 5<sup>th</sup> MGC Ministerial Meeting chaired by India, held at Manila, Philippines on August 1, 2007, reviewed and discussed the cooperation in each of the four core areas. The meeting agreed to expedite the setting up of the Museum of Traditional Asian Textiles at Siem Reap, Cambodia. India's continued support to 50 MGC scholarships was appreciated. In addition to these scholarships India offered 50 scholarships to enable scholars from the MGC countries to study in India. These scholarships were meant for diverse areas of study such as Culture, Buddhist, IT, Vocational training etc. India also offered to organize Education fairs in MGC countries to create greater awareness about the education facilities available in India. The Hanoi Programme of Action (HPA) was extended by six years from August 2007 to July 2013.

7. India hosted the 6<sup>th</sup> MGC Ministerial Meeting on September 4, 2012, in New Delhi. In addition to the existing 4 areas of collaboration under MGC, certain new areas were identified at this meeting for forging cooperation. These include health research relevant to the region and sharing of expertise on pandemic management, bringing together the complementarities that exist in the SME sector in India and the Mekong States, aspects related to food security and preserving the rich bio-diversity of our region. India's initiative in Setting up of the Traditional Asian Textiles Museum at Siem Reap, Cambodia was highly appreciated. India announced a commitment of USD 1 million annually for the India-CLMV Quick Impact Projects Revolving Fund. This fund would be for short gestation projects that could directly benefit local communities, with results that are immediate and visible. These additional elements were seen as a clear reiteration of members' commitment towards the MGC.

8. The 7<sup>th</sup> MGC Ministerial Meeting is scheduled to be held in Brunei on July 2, 2013 under the Chairmanship of Lao PDR.

\*\*\*\*\*

**May 2013**