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## **Japan, Mekong Countries Eye New Strategy for Cooperation** **Articles**



The Japan-Mekong Connectivity Initiative invests in hard and soft infrastructure projects in the Greater Mekong Subregion, including human resource development. Photo: ADB.

Foreign ministers from Japan and five Mekong nations this month identified areas of cooperation under a new strategy and reviewed the progress of joint projects in the East-West Economic Corridor and Southern Economic Corridor.

The 11th Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers Meeting was held in Singapore on 3 August on the sidelines of the 51st ASEAN Foreign Ministerial Meeting. The ministerial meeting includes the five Southeast Asian nations along the Mekong River and promotes the development of the Greater Mekong Subregion as well as the ASEAN Economic Community.

The meeting was chaired by Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs Taro Kono and

attended by Sok Siphana, Advisor to the Government of Cambodia; Saleumxay Kommasith, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR); Kyaw Tin, Union Minister for International Cooperation of Myanmar; Don Pramudwinai, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand; and Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam.

### **Three priority areas**

According to the [statement issued by the meeting's chairman](#) [3], the foreign ministers identified three priority areas for future cooperation to narrow the development gap and strengthen regional integration and participation in the global value chain. The priorities are enhanced connectivity through quality infrastructure; people-to-people connectivity, particularly through human resource development, universal health coverage, primary and higher education, and women's empowerment; and sustainable development, including sustainable water resource management of the Mekong River.

The ministers agreed to work out a new strategy in line with these priorities at the 10th Mekong-Japan Summit in Tokyo in October this year.

### **Increased connectivity**

The ministers also reviewed the progress of projects to enhance connectivity in the subregion. The Japan-Mekong Connectivity Initiative, launched in 2016, invests in transport and institutional infrastructure in the Greater Mekong Subregion and supports the development of the East-West Economic Corridor and the Southern Economic Corridor.

The ministers noted how the Japan-Mekong Connectivity Initiative has reduced travel time and promoted trade in the subregion through infrastructure development in the East-West Economic Corridor and the Southern Economic Corridor. These include completed and ongoing road projects in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam, and capacity development at Cambodia's Sihanoukville port. These are complemented by "soft" infrastructure projects, such as improving automated cargo clearance in Viet Nam and Myanmar, the Sustainable Future a City Initiative in Thailand, and human resource development for the private sector.

The East-West Economic Corridor runs from Da Nang Port in Viet Nam, through Lao PDR, Thailand, and to Myanmar. The Southern Economic Corridor links Cambodia with six provinces in Thailand, including Bangkok, four regions in Viet Nam including Ho Chi Minh City, and six provinces in Lao People's Democratic Republic. It reaches to Dawei in Myanmar.

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