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Greater Mekong Subregion : twenty-five years of partnership

Provided in Cooperation with:

Asian Development Bank (ADB), Manila

Reference: (2018). Greater Mekong Subregion : twenty-five years of partnership. Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila, Philippines : Asian Development Bank.

This Version is available at:

<http://hdl.handle.net/11159/2547>

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GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP



GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION

T W E N T Y - F I V E Y E A R S O F P A R T N E R S H I P

OCTOBER 2018





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ISBN 978-92-9261-092-0 (print), 978-92-9261-093-7 (electronic)
Publication Stock No. ARM189253-2
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22617/ARM189253-2>

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1. Sunrise at Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia (photo from iStock.com).
2. Entrance to the Haw Pha Bang temple, in Luang Prabang, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) (photo from Shutterstock.com).
3. A section of the Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon, Myanmar (photo from iStock.com).
4. Terraced rice fields in Mu Cang Chai, a mountainous district of Yen Bai Province, Viet Nam (photo from iStock.com).
5. Shilin (Stone Forest), Yunnan Province, People's Republic of China (photo from iStock.com).
6. Ang Thong National Marine Park, Thailand (photo from iStock.com).

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1. Silhouettes of temples in Bagan, Myanmar (photo from iStock.com).
2. A long-tail boat at sunset in southern Thailand (photo from iStock.com).
3. Skyline of Ho Chi Minh City at night, Viet Nam (photo from iStock.com).
4. Traditional fishing in Thailand (photo from iStock.com).

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Greater Mekong Subregion Cooperation: An Economic Success Story

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) was emerging from a long period of conflict, with high poverty rates and dilapidated infrastructure. There was scant travel and trade among the six GMS countries—Cambodia, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (focusing on Yunnan Province), the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam; instead, they focused inwardly on self-sufficiency. At that time, it seemed bold to envisage the subregion connected by modern highways and railroads, with robust energy trade and bustling cross-border commerce and tourism. In 1992, the six countries established the GMS Program. Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of the PRC joined the program in 2004. It focuses on (i) increasing connectivity through sustainable development of physical infrastructure and economic corridors; (ii) improving competitiveness through efficient facilitation of cross-border movement of people and goods, integration of markets, and enhancing value chains; and (iii) building a greater sense of community through shared concerns. The GMS Program paid particular attention to building strategic alliances, especially with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN+3 (ASEAN, plus the PRC, Japan, and the Republic of Korea), and the Mekong River Commission.

This publication, *Greater Mekong Subregion: Twenty-five Years of Partnership*, highlights the GMS Program’s successful use of economic corridors and focus on priority sectors to achieve tremendous development gains for the subregion and its people. Presenting vibrant scenes from across the subregion, the book tells a story of progress by GMS countries in the areas of agriculture, energy, the environment, health, information and communications technology, tourism, transport, trade facilitation, and urban development.

From the program’s beginning, GMS countries pursued a pragmatic, action-oriented approach. In the early years, they concentrated on building roads, bridges, and other infrastructure to forge mutually beneficial links and drive growth. As the program progressed, it became more dynamic, as did the subregion itself. In 2002, the GMS countries agreed to develop three economic corridors that would extend the benefits of regional cooperation to rural areas. Over the following decade, they supported initiatives that addressed emerging challenges such as climate change, energy efficiency, food security, and rapid urbanization. More recently, they jointly developed an impressive pipeline of over 200 cross-cutting investment and technical assistance projects that will spur new economic development throughout the subregion—and beyond.

As the GMS countries celebrate the program’s 25th anniversary, they continue to be guided by the “3 Cs”: connectivity, competitiveness, and community. Connectivity has been dramatically enhanced by the more than 10,000 kilometers of new or upgraded roads and nearly 3,000 kilometers of transmission and distribution lines that were added under the program. The subregion’s competitiveness is being strengthened by ongoing efforts to facilitate transport and trade flows, strengthen value chains, and promote the GMS as a single tourist destination. The program is advancing community building through initiatives to check the spread of communicable diseases, protect the subregion’s rich biodiversity, and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

As shown throughout this book, the GMS countries have committed themselves to continuing their joint efforts to develop cross-border transport and energy infrastructure, as well as information and communications technology connectivity. They are also committed to harmonizing trade and transport regulations; developing e-commerce; and working together on programs to enhance cooperation in tourism, agriculture, communicable disease prevention, human resource development, and environmental preservation. They will also work more to strengthen links between rural and urban areas in the subregion, thereby ensuring more equitable economic growth for all of the region’s people.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) was itself created to achieve greater regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific, and is proud to have been a strong supporter of the GMS cooperation framework from its inception. Since 1992, ADB has provided over \$8 billion in financing to support priority GMS projects that have contributed meaningfully to higher economic growth and improvements in people’s quality of life.

ADB looks forward to continued cooperation with the GMS Program, and is committed to supporting its increasingly innovative efforts to deliver prosperity and well-being to all of the 340 million people in the subregion.



Takehiko Nakao
President
Asian Development Bank



The image is a full-page background photograph. It depicts a wide expanse of water, likely a lake or a large river, under a dramatic sky. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds that are illuminated from below by a low sun, creating a warm palette of oranges, yellows, and pinks. In the foreground, several large, dark green lotus leaves are scattered across the water's surface. A few vibrant pink lotus flowers are in bloom, their petals fully open. In the far distance, a city skyline is visible on the horizon, with various buildings and structures silhouetted against the bright sky. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

The Greater Mekong Subregion Partnership

THE GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION (GMS) is a development success story. Over the past quarter century, the GMS has enjoyed a period of unparalleled peace and prosperity. Impressive economic growth has helped raise millions of people out of poverty. Today, a person born in the subregion can expect to enjoy a more secure livelihood and to live longer and more healthily than any previous generation.

The six GMS member countries are Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, the People's Republic of China (PRC), Thailand, and Viet Nam. In the PRC, the GMS includes the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Yunnan Province.

With its 340 million people, vast array of landscapes, multitude of ethnic groups, and differing development histories and trajectories, the GMS is a diverse and dynamic region. However, the six countries also share many opportunities and challenges that transcend national boundaries. Economic integration, environmental sustainability, and adaptation to climate change are but a few examples.

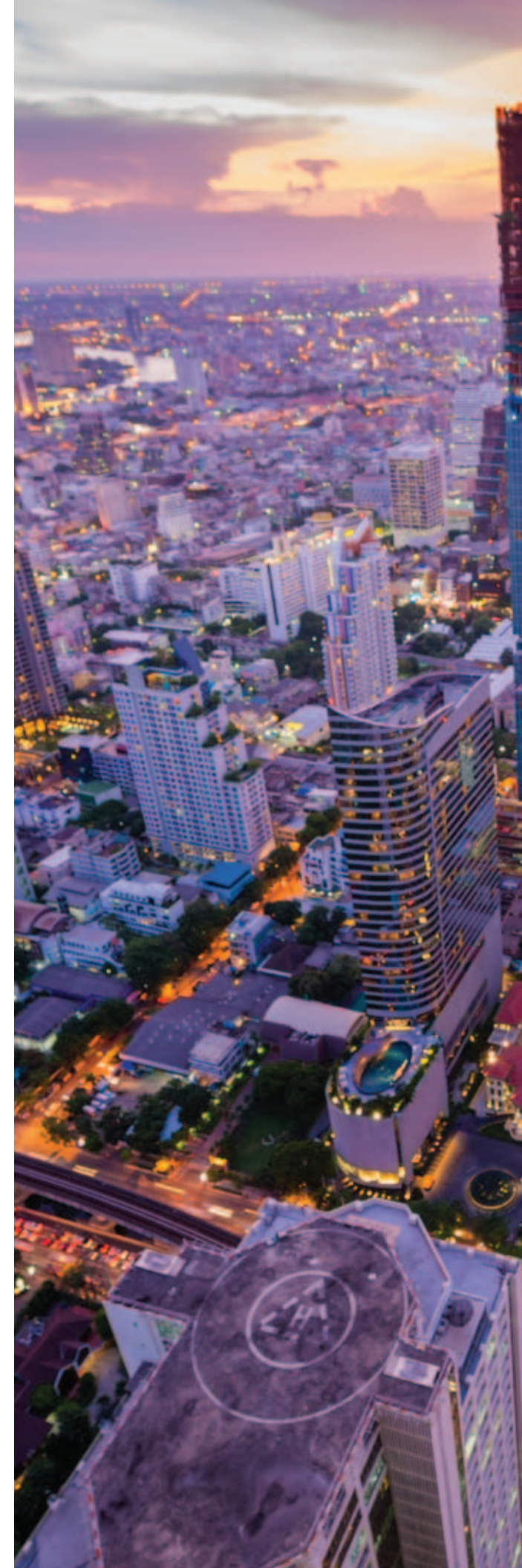
Recognizing that their combined efforts would have a greater development impact, the six countries launched the GMS Economic Cooperation Program in 1992. The Asian Development Bank was chosen to serve as the program's secretariat. During its first decade, the GMS Program initiated activities slowly but steadily, focusing on a relatively small selection of energy and road infrastructure projects.

The damaging Asian financial crisis of 1997 spurred the countries to strengthen their cooperation. In 2002, for example, a 10-year GMS Strategic Framework was endorsed by the national leaders at their first GMS summit. The countries committed

themselves to a joint vision of an integrated, prosperous, and equitable subregion. This was to be achieved by enhancing connectivity, improving competitiveness, and building a strong sense of community (the "3 Cs"). During its second decade, the GMS Program made important progress in building roads and other "hard" infrastructure. Successful projects were also initiated in sectors such as agriculture, environment, trade facilitation, human resource development, and tourism.

By 2012, GMS cooperation was well established across nine priority sectors, and the member countries embarked on a new and more ambitious 10-year strategy. The focus shifted firmly toward creating "economic corridors," with a range of investments designed to leverage the transport infrastructure that had been built during the prior 2 decades. This new strategy also emphasized an increase in multisector investments, as well as policy and institutional reforms. A regional investment framework was then developed to identify country priorities and guide investments.

Five years into this new strategy, and now a quarter century old, the maturing GMS Program continues to deliver significant results. More than \$20 billion in investments have been directly channeled through the program since 1992. These have helped the GMS countries to diversify, strengthen, and integrate their economies. They have also significantly contributed





to poverty reduction and to the achievement of many other Millennium Development Goals. The GMS Program directly benefits livelihoods by providing better employment, education, and health-care opportunities. At the same time, it works with communities and governments to develop pathways to environmentally sustainable growth.

The GMS Program has also fostered increasingly strong bonds among the member countries based on openness, mutual trust, and a shared sense of commitment. Today, the GMS Program is a truly inclusive partnership that brings together member governments, development partners, international organizations, the private sector, and, increasingly, civil society. Their combined efforts—plus the GMS Program’s pragmatic, focused approach—have made this program one of the world’s most successful regional cooperation initiatives.

Guided by the 3 Cs, the GMS Program continues to learn and evolve, a process that is essential for identifying new challenges and opportunities, such as those presented by the developing economic community of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In 2015, all six GMS partner countries committed themselves to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The GMS Program will play a significant role in reaching those goals. In March 2018, ministers representing the GMS member governments endorsed the *Ha Noi Action Plan (2018–2022)*, which provides a 5-year road map for refining GMS Program priorities and improving operational performance.

Twenty-five years in, the GMS Program is set to continue boosting the subregion’s development success for many years to come.

The Greater Mekong Subregion's Economic Corridors

FOR MANY YEARS, the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Economic Cooperation Program focused on building roads. The assumption was that “hard” transport infrastructure would automatically spur economic activity. However, the GMS partners realized that, although essential, roads alone would not be enough. The concept of “economic corridors” emerged in 1998, and has since become a fundamental element of the GMS Program’s strategy. An economic corridor is an integrated network of hard and “soft” infrastructure within a geographic area, designed to accelerate economic development in countries and regions. With its spatial focus and complementary investments, the corridor approach enables more development impact, extending from local communities to national economies.

Under the GMS Program, there are three main corridors: the East–West Economic Corridor, the North–South Economic Corridor, and the Southern Economic Corridor. Within each of these corridors, the GMS Program is optimizing its investments by focusing on nine priority sectors, so as to develop the corridors as hubs for regional trade and transport, investment, and tourism. As part of this approach, the program is enhancing special economic zones along borders, as well as corridor towns, to strengthen rural–urban ties and link markets across the subregion. Road connectivity continues to be an important priority. Meanwhile, the environmental and social risks associated with increased economic activity are being assessed and addressed at the corridor level.

In 2016, the economic corridor networks were expanded to enhance connectivity among GMS capitals, major economic centers, and important maritime gateways, thereby boosting opportunities for cross-border trade and investment.



Priority Sectors

THE GMS PROGRAM is built around nine priority sectors. Over the years, the scope of the sectors has either broadened or become more focused, depending on the needs of the partner countries. In 2012, GMS ministers endorsed urban development as a new priority sector for cooperation. E-commerce was designated in 2015 as part of the information and communication technology (ICT) sector.

AGRICULTURE

With vast and fertile land resources, the GMS is one of the world's most important agricultural regions. It is a leading global supplier of rice, rubber, and cassava, in addition to being a growing force in aquaculture. Although GMS economies are diversifying, agriculture remains hugely important, especially for the subregion's 200 million small-scale farmers. The sector is vital for the GMS countries' achievement of their Sustainable Development Goals, including the goal of ending poverty and hunger. The GMS Core Agriculture Support Program facilitates collaboration among the six countries, with a focus on trade, investment, and knowledge exchange. Together, the GMS partners are making gains in productivity, using land and water resources more sustainably, ensuring food safety, and maximizing the agriculture sector's contribution to poverty reduction. In late 2017, GMS ministers endorsed a 5-year strategy for positioning the subregion as a major global supplier of "safe and environment-friendly agriculture products."



▶ Right: Green rice flakes (photo from iStock.com).

ENERGY

The GMS has a wealth of energy resources, including coal, oil, and natural gas, in addition to water for hydropower. In recent years, the member countries have invested heavily in energy-generation projects to meet the surging domestic demand. Gas-fired and hydropower plants have been the major focus, although the PRC and Thailand are also actively pursuing wind and solar sources. The GMS member countries share the goal of energy security, and are working together to find new solutions for meeting energy demand. For instance, they are enhancing regional coordination for power trading, including the exchange of information on energy sector plans and projects. The ultimate goals are to provide an adequate and sustainable supply of energy throughout the subregion at an affordable price, ensure reliable energy access in rural areas, and encourage investment. GMS countries are working together to establish a Regional Power Coordination Center to facilitate regional power trading.



ENVIRONMENT

The GMS is one of the world's most important biodiversity areas, home to an incredibly diverse range of ecosystems. The subregion's valuable natural capital—including extensive water resources and fertile soils—is central to the subregion's economic development. All the GMS countries are increasing their efforts to ensure environmental sustainability and to develop green growth pathways. Since 2006, subregional cooperation has been facilitated by the Bangkok-based GMS Environment Operations Center and funded by the GMS Core Environment Program (CEP). Through CEP, the countries work together to improve their environmental management capacity and policies, access financing, and address transboundary environmental challenges. In recent years, CEP has helped countries achieve progress in the areas of environmental safeguards, climate change adaptation, “green freight,” and biodiversity conservation. Emerging priorities for regional environmental collaboration include disaster risk management, green technologies, and sustainable infrastructure.



◀ Left: Oil refinery in Thailand (photo from iStock.com). Right: Banded kingfisher in Khao Yai National Park, Thailand (photo from iStock.com).

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH

A healthy, educated, and skilled population underpins prosperity and improvements in the quality of life in the GMS. The member countries have made impressive progress in human resource development and health. The reach and quality of education is improving. For instance, primary education today is almost universal. Although health challenges remain, issues such as infant mortality and communicable diseases are being managed better than ever before. Life expectancy continues to rise.

The GMS partners have long cooperated on health and education, as well as on social development, labor, and migration. Recent initiatives include the construction of university networks to improve tertiary education and collaboration to strengthen technical and vocational education and training. GMS health initiatives have focused on malaria and communicable diseases (including HIV), especially for migrant populations and residents of border areas. In response to the growing demand from the GMS member countries, GMS ministers endorsed the creation of the Working Group on Health Cooperation in 2017.



► **Left:** Women at work in a silk factory in Da Lat, Lam Dong Province, Viet Nam (photo from fototrav/iStock.com). **Right:** Young traveler using her mobile phone in Viet Nam (photo from iStock.com).

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

ICT is helping to transcend geographic boundaries across the GMS. More and more people have access to phones and the internet, enabling individuals, communities, and businesses to connect and collaborate as never before. The GMS countries recognize the importance of investing in ICT to improve productivity and efficiency, build knowledge-based economies, and reduce poverty. Under the GMS Program, cooperation in this sector has contributed to a subregional “information super highway” based on interconnected telecommunications infrastructure. The countries are now leveraging ICT to make the GMS more economically integrated and competitive. In 2015, the GMS Cross-Border E-Commerce Cooperation Platform was established, followed a year later by the GMS E-Commerce Business Alliance. Together, these two initiatives are boosting intra-regional trade through policy exchanges, enterprise interaction, and capacity building.



TOURISM

GMS tourism is flourishing. The subregion's outstanding cultural and natural assets attract more than 60 million international visitors per year. Across the GMS, tourism employs about 10 million people and contributes substantially to social and economic progress. The *GMS Tourism Sector Strategy 2016–2025* reflects the subregion's commitment to promoting inclusive and sustainable tourism development. Led by the GMS Tourism Working Group, the strategy aims to strengthen human resources, improve infrastructure and service quality, creatively market the GMS as a single destination, and ease travel formalities.



TRANSPORT

The GMS countries have made great strides toward enhancing basic transport infrastructure over the past quarter century. New and improved road networks have helped provide economic opportunities to tens of millions of people in rural areas. Expanded and upgraded highways, airports, railways, and seaports have dramatically enhanced physical connectivity—in the GMS and with the rest of the world. Transport infrastructure and investment needs differ from country to country, but all six GMS members share the vision of a “seamless, efficient, reliable, and sustainable GMS transport system.” Historically, GMS regional investments in transport infrastructure emphasized the expansion and enhancement of road networks, which have been the “backbone” of economic corridor development. In recent years, however, attention has extended to other transport infrastructure as well, including the construction of an integrated railway network. The creation of an environmentally friendly, climate-resilient, safe, and sustainable transport system is becoming a top priority.



◀ Left: Four friends exploring in Thailand (photo from iStock.com). Right: A truck crosses the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge, which connects Mukdahan Province in Thailand with Savannakhet Province in the Lao PDR (photo from ADB).

▶ Left: Freight transport in Thailand (photo from ADB). Right: Ho Chi Minh City at night (photo from ADB).

The Mekong Business Initiative

NEW AND EMERGING INITIATIVES

in the subregion are complementing the work of the GMS Program. The Mekong Business Initiative (MBI)—supported by the Asian Development Bank and the Government of Australia—is one example.

Launched in 2015, MBI is a private sector development program that provides targeted support for innovation to catalyze entrepreneurship. MBI identifies and promotes promising business models in high-potential sectors such as agribusiness, financial technology, tourism, and smart city solutions. Its support services include public-private dialogues, business matching, technology transfer, trade support, connecting investor networks, and assistance to woman founders.

More details can be found in the Mekong Business Initiative website. <http://www.mekongbiz.org>.

Sources: Author and the Mekong Business Initiative.

TRANSPORT AND TRADE FACILITATION

Over recent decades, the extensive road networks and other transport infrastructure built in the GMS countries have gone a long way toward transforming the subregion into a dynamic, interconnected trade hub. With much of the basic “hard” infrastructure in place, the GMS countries are also working together to expedite the implementation of the GMS Cross-Border Transport Facilitation Agreement (CBTA). The aim is to improve the rules, regulations, agreements, and other “software” so that goods and people can move more quickly, cheaply, easily, and inclusively. In addition to the CBTA, regional cooperation efforts are guided by the GMS Transport and Trade Facilitation Action Program, which is helping to expand transport and traffic rights, particularly along the North–South, East–West, and Southern economic corridors. GMS countries are working together to issue regional transport permits that enable trucks to move more freely across borders. Progress has been made in simplifying and modernizing customs procedures and border management controls. The GMS countries are also working together to ensure that the movement and trade of food products is safe and disease-free.



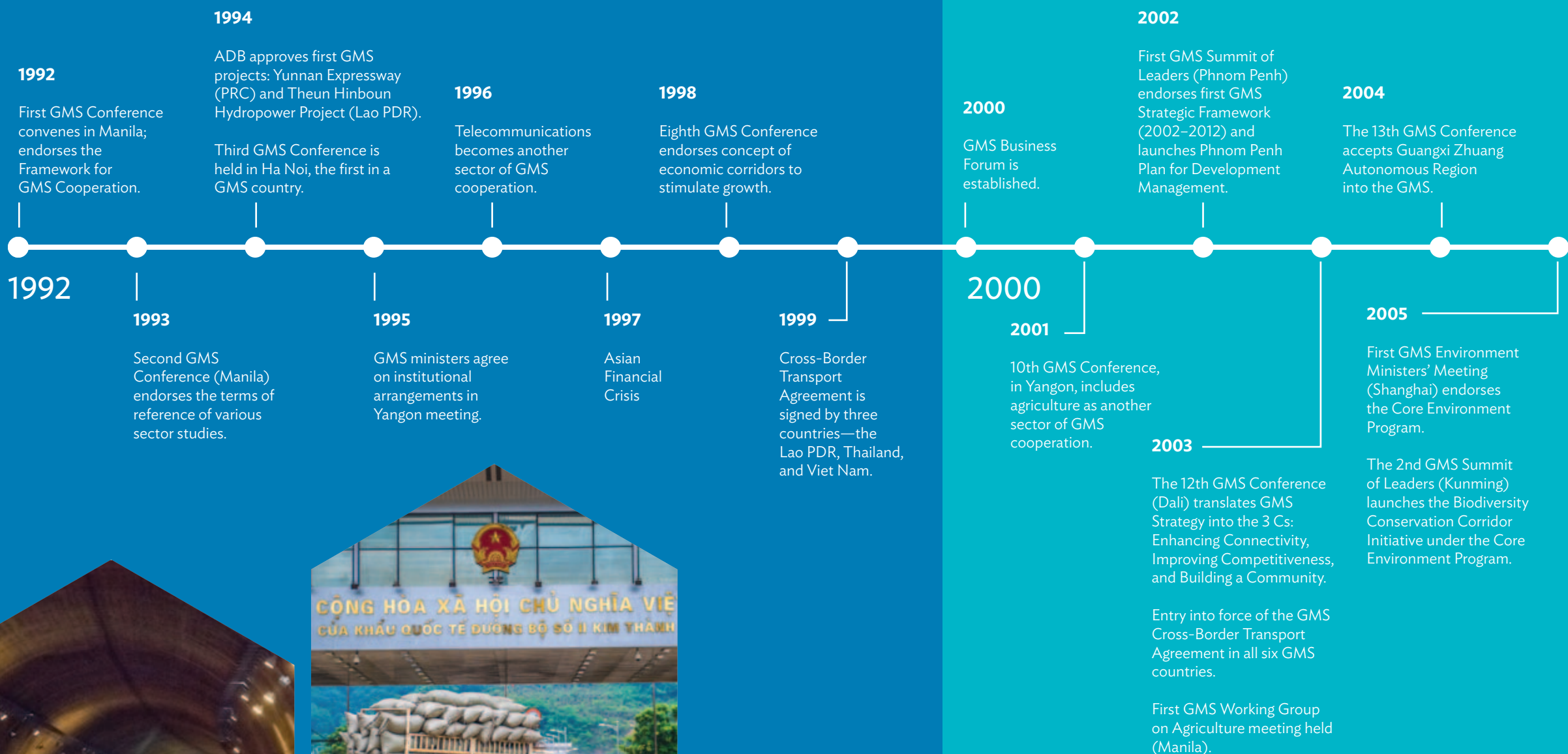
URBAN DEVELOPMENT

All across the GMS, rapidly growing cities and towns are becoming hubs of economic activity, making vital contributions to poverty reduction in these urban areas and in nearby rural communities. By 2050, cities and towns will be home to more than half of the subregion’s people. GMS cooperation on urban development aims to ensure sustainable urban growth by supporting infrastructure planning and development. The GMS Urban Development Strategic Framework was endorsed by the ministers representing the member countries at a GMS conference in September 2015. It identified key priorities, such as green development initiatives, greater climate resilience, strengthened disaster risk management, and increased competitiveness. Since 2012, a project under the GMS Program has been developing border towns and urban centers along economic corridors in Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam. Cooperation within this sector is coordinated by the GMS Urban Development Working Group, which was upgraded from a “Task Force” in late 2016.



The GMS at 25

MILESTONES







▲ The 6th Greater Mekong Subregion Summit of Leaders in Ha Noi (from left): Prime Minister of Thailand Prayut Chan-o-cha, Prime Minister of the Lao PDR Thongloun Sisoulith, Prime Minister of Cambodia Samdech Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of Viet Nam Nguyen Xuan Phuc, the PRC's State Councilor Wang Yi, Vice-President of Myanmar Henry Van Thio, and ADB President Takehiko Nakao (photo from ADB).

◀ Previous page spread, clockwise from top left:

1. Bean farmer in Viet Nam (photo from ADB).
2. Solar power in Thailand (photo from ADB).
3. Landscape in Viet Nam (photo from ADB).
4. Factory worker in the Lao PDR (photo from ADB).
5. Office worker in the Lao PDR (photo from ADB).
6. Buddha statue in Ayutthaya, Thailand (photo from iStock.com).
7. Ha Noi, capital of Viet Nam (photo from ADB).
8. Freight transport in Viet Nam (photo from ADB).
9. Road tunnel in Viet Nam (photo from ADB).



The Greater Mekong Subregion Countries



Cambodia



Overview

CAMBODIA'S ECONOMIC GROWTH

has been among the world's fastest during the past quarter century, driven by garment manufacturing, tourism, rice production, and construction. In 2015, the nation achieved lower-middle-income status, and has now set its sights on attaining upper-middle-income status by 2030. Cambodia has made significant progress in reducing poverty and achieving many other Millennium Development Goals. The country is also very active in GMS cooperation. National development priorities include ensuring stable, sustainable, and equitable economic growth; increasing employment opportunities; improving governance; and reducing poverty further. Although many challenges remain, the country's development trajectory holds much promise for the future.

◀ A nighttime panorama of Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia (photo from iStock.com).

Previous page: Rice fields in Guilin, Guangxi, PRC (photo from iStock.com).

Agriculture

The high-performing agriculture sector of Cambodia has helped lift millions of people out of poverty during the past 2 decades. Higher yields, diversification, and increased farm wages have helped greatly. Although rice continues to be the most important crop, greater emphasis on vegetables, cassava, and maize are proving to be profitable. The country has benefited from agricultural investments and farming knowledge provided by its GMS partners. As agriculture remains central to Cambodia's development strategy, the priorities include building farmers' skills, increasing irrigation, and investing more in aquaculture and livestock. The country is also aiming to become a bigger global exporter of rice.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Rice fields in Cambodia (photo from iStock.com).
2. Boats floating near rice fields outside Phnom Penh (photo from iStock.com).
3. Mushroom farmer at Kandor Chrum commune, Tbong Khmum Province (photo from ADB).
4. Bitter melon farmer at Neang Tert commune, Tbong Khmum Province (photo from ADB).





Energy

Cambodia has significantly increased its electricity generation in recent years by building new hydropower and coal-fired plants. However, the country still relies heavily on electricity imports from the Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The proportion of the population without electricity has rapidly decreased this past decade, but still remains high. Government targets include ensuring that all households have access to some form of electricity by 2020, and to grid-quality electricity by 2030. The country is also looking to increase the proportion of hydropower in the domestic energy production mix.

► Left: Rooftops of Phnom Penh at night (photo from iStock.com). Right: A man lights a biogas-fueled lamp in a rural village in Cambodia (photo from ADB).





Environment

Cambodia is a biodiversity hot spot, rich in species and ecosystem diversity. Tonle Sap is the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia, supporting incredibly productive and diverse fisheries. The country's environment includes a high proportion of natural forest, including the rain forest of the Cardamom Mountains—one of the region's most species-rich habitats. In recent years, Cambodia has increased its efforts to prevent forest and biodiversity loss by banning economic land concessions and adding 1.4 million hectares of “biodiversity corridors” to its already extensive protected land areas. The country is also close to finalizing a comprehensive national strategy for guiding environmental sustainability efforts until 2023.

► Clockwise from top left:

1. Close-up of a cannonball flower (photo from Shutterstock.com).
2. A beach in Sihanoukville at sunset (photo from Shutterstock.com).
3. Mangrove forest in Tonle Sap Lake, near Siem Reap (photo from iStock.com).
4. Sarus cranes at a wintering site (photo from Shutterstock.com).
5. Monsoon rains at sunset on Tonle Sap Lake (photo from iStock.com).





Human Resource Development and Health

Human resource development is essential for achieving Cambodia's goal of attaining upper-middle-income status by 2030. Primary education is now nearly universal, and efforts are under way to improve vocational training and higher education as a means of accelerating industrialization. Cambodia has also strengthened its health system in recent years, resulting in significant improvements in the health of women and children. The country is looking to further expand its health coverage, and is working with its GMS partners to eradicate malaria and to more effectively manage emerging diseases.

► Clockwise from top left:

1. Beneficiaries of the Women's Development Centers Project in Loung village, Kampong Chhnang Province (photo from ADB).
2. Women weaving silk on traditional looms at a farm in Siem Reap Province (photo from catshiles/iStock.com).
3. Women at an ADB-supported training center in Siem Reap (photo from ADB).





Information and Communication Technology

ICT has played an increasingly important role in the impressive progress of Cambodia's development over the past decade. Today, the vast majority of people in the country use mobile phones; and internet access continues to grow rapidly, with a quarter of the population now "online," up from only 3% in 2011. A government priority is to continue enhancing the ICT sector, and efforts are under way to improve the country's telecommunications infrastructure, including the extension of coverage to remote communities. Other goals include scaling up ICT use in education and stimulating more private sector investment.

► Left: A traveler taking a photo with her mobile phone at Angkor Wat, near Siem Reap (photo from Shutterstock.com). Right: A communications tower next to Tonle Sap Lake (photo from Shutterstock.com).





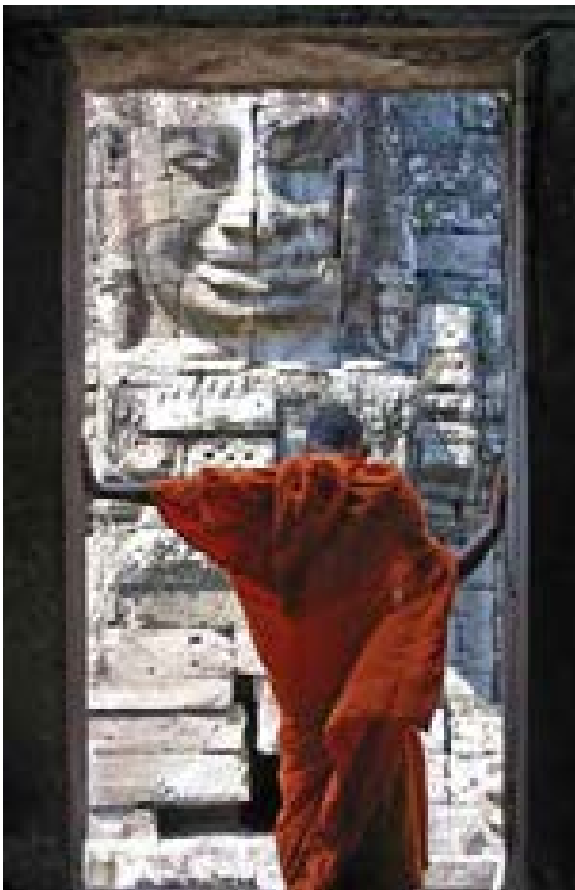
Tourism

Millions of tourists visit Cambodia each year to experience the country's rich cultural and natural heritage. Angkor Wat and Phnom Penh continue to be the main tourist destinations, while the coastal areas and the unique Tonle Sap Lake are growing in popularity. In 2016, international tourist arrivals reached 5 million for the first time, twice as many as in 2010. Cambodia is working closely with other GMS countries to promote sustainable tourism as a means of achieving inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Sunrise at Angkor Wat, Siem Reap (photo from iStock.com).
2. Illuminated Pub Street, in Siem Reap, packed with bars, hotels, restaurants, and shops (photo from Mlenny/iStock.com).
3. Buddhist stupa and Silver Pagoda, Phnom Penh (photo from iStock.com).
4. Facade of the Bayon temple, at Angkor Thom, Siem Reap (photo from iStock.com).





Transport

Cambodia has made important strides toward improving its transport infrastructure in recent decades. New and better roads, seaports, and airports are helping to drive trade and socioeconomic development. The country's main national roads have been significantly improved, and road linkages with GMS neighbors greatly enhanced. But more remains to be done. With support from its GMS partners, Cambodia needs to reinvigorate its railways to create a more efficient transport system, and to build stronger linkages with neighbors such as Thailand and Viet Nam. Other priorities include upgrading rural roads and furthering subregional connectivity by strengthening the road networks along the GMS Southern Economic Corridor.

► Clockwise from left:

1. On a rowboat on Tonle Sap Lake, in Kampong Phluk, Siem Reap Province (photo from ADB).
2. Bridge over the strait between Sihanoukville and Koh Puos Island (photo from Shutterstock.com).
3. Boats moored at Ream National Park (photo from Shutterstock.com).
4. A Cambodian taxi (photo from iStock.com).





Transport and Trade Facilitation

Cambodia's growing trade with its GMS partners—especially the PRC, Thailand, and Viet Nam—has helped the country achieve impressive economic growth in recent years. Two-thirds of Cambodia's imports are from GMS countries (including petroleum and fabrics), and a large portion of Cambodia's exports go to GMS countries (including agricultural products, garments, and timber). Working with its GMS neighbors, Cambodia is upgrading bilateral agreements to enhance cross-border transport and trade, including agreements to increase the exchange of traffic rights. In addition, the country now has automated customs-clearance systems, and is further developing paperless trade.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Sihanoukville seaport, the biggest port in Cambodia (photo from Shutterstock.com).
2. Cambodian fishers passing their catch of blue crabs to women, who will sell them (photo from Shutterstock.com).
3. Bavet checkpoint, on the Cambodian side of the border with Viet Nam (photo from ADB).
4. On the main road of Poipet, near the Thailand border (photo from ADB).
5. A ship loaded with dredged sand on a river in Phnom Penh (photo from Shutterstock.com).





Urban Development

Although nearly 80% of Cambodians live in rural areas—the highest proportion in the GMS—the country’s urban centers are growing fast. Phnom Penh’s population has tripled since the turn of the century, and many towns in the Tonle Sap lowlands are also burgeoning. Tourism and trade are boosting growth in the port city of Sihanoukville, Siem Reap, and other towns. Cambodia is now looking to improve the streets, waste management facilities, and flood control systems in its urban centers.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Phnom Penh sunrise (photo from iStock.com).
2. Phnom Penh at night (photo from Shutterstock.com).
3. Evening traffic in Phnom Penh (photo from iStock.com).
4. Psar Thmei, the central market in Phnom Penh (photo from Shutterstock.com).





People's Republic of



China

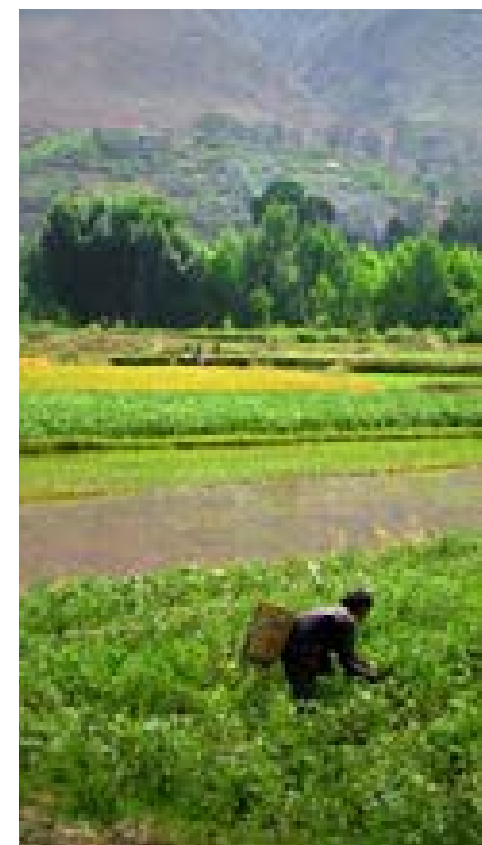
Overview

GUANGXI AND YUNNAN ARE IMPORTANT “GATEWAYS” for trade between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the rest of the GMS. Development has been slow compared with most provinces in the PRC. However, on the back of the country’s impressive economic performance in recent decades, both Guangxi and Yunnan have benefited from improved infrastructure and social services. The PRC is looking to further build on their strategic location by making large transport investments aimed at strengthening connectivity with other GMS countries. It is also actively promoting increased GMS cooperation in sectors such as agriculture, education, energy, the environment, human resource development, and health.

◀ Reflections in the water, Guilin, Guangxi (photo from iStock.com).

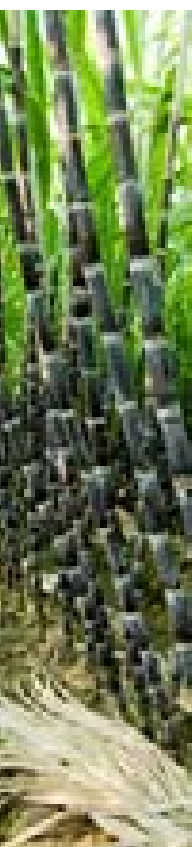
Agriculture

Although much of the rugged land in Guangxi and Yunnan cannot be farmed, agriculture is still the livelihood mainstay for millions of rural people. Yunnan has a sizable portion of the PRC's rubber trees, and the province is famous for its tea. Guangxi produces a large sugarcane crop and grows many varieties of fruit. Moreover, each has a wide range of agricultural products found nowhere else, including medicinal plants. Guangxi and Yunnan are both looking to further leverage their positions as “gateways” for agricultural trade between the GMS and the rest of the PRC. They are working to increase agribusiness investments throughout the subregion.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Landscape in Yunnan (photo from iStock.com).
2. A tea farmer in Yunnan (photo from iStock.com).
3. Longji terraced rice fields, in Longsheng, Guilin (photo from iStock.com).
4. Sugarcane plantation in Guangxi (photo from iStock.com).
5. Flooded rice fields in Guilin Prefecture (photo from iStock.com).



Energy

The PRC has the largest power system in the world and is the leading producer of electricity from renewable sources. Yunnan Province has become an important source of clean energy for the country, as well as a hub for the transregional oil and gas. Both Guangxi and Yunnan have extensive hydropower resources, and they are engaged in power-trade and interconnection projects with neighboring countries such as the Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Nanning, capital of Guangxi (photo from iStock.com).
2. Lijiang, Yunnan (photo from iStock.com).
3. Tiger Leaping Gorge, Yunnan (photo from iStock.com).





Environment

Guangxi and Yunnan boast some of the most varied landscapes in the subregion, including glacial mountains and large limestone karst formations. They are both home to a high proportion of the PRC's animal and plant species, many of which are endemic. Guangxi and Yunnan have both made great strides toward establishing biodiversity corridors to engender forest connectivity among protected areas. In fact, the PRC is a GMS leader in promoting transboundary collaboration between countries on biodiversity conservation along borders.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Sunrise at Meili Snow Mountain, Yunnan (photo from iStock.com).
2. Messire mountain scenery, Guilin (photo from iStock.com).
3. Yunnan snub-nosed monkeys (photo from iStock.com).
4. Sunset Valley, Dongchuan Red Land, Yunnan (photo from iStock.com).
5. Black-necked cranes at Dashanbao National Nature Reserve, Yunnan (photo from iStock.com).





Human Resource Development and Health

The PRC's investments in human resource development are helping to modernize and diversify the economies of Guangxi and Yunnan. Technical and vocational education and training have been priorities, with a particular emphasis on rural and ethnic-minority populations. The PRC is a leader in GMS cooperation on education, each year providing thousands of scholarships for students from across the subregion, many of whom attend universities in Guangxi and Yunnan. It also actively promotes cooperation on health issues, with a focus on border areas. Further, the PRC is looking to strengthen existing partnerships with its GMS neighbors on health security, health training, research, information sharing, and disease management.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Elementary schoolchildren in the PRC (photo from humphery/Shutterstock.com).
2. Man fishing on the Li River at Xingping, Guangxi (photo from Vadim Petrakov/Shutterstock.com).
3. Women in traditional dress, Guangxi (photo from iStock.com).
4. Women in traditional dress, Guilin (photo from SteveAllenPhoto/iStock.com).





Information and Communication Technology

ICT is supporting socioeconomic development in the PRC. The expansion of internet and other ICT services is enabling thousands of rural communities to overcome geographic isolation and to access new economic and educational opportunities. ICT is also playing a key role in strengthening Guangxi and Yunnan as the PRC's trade "gateways" to the other GMS countries. New e-commerce platforms and zones have been created to boost cross-border trade. The PRC also actively supports the GMS E-Commerce Business Alliance.

► **Left:** Woman in traditional dress using a mobile phone in Shangri-La, Yunnan (photo from Citta Studio/Shutterstock.com). **Right:** Children staring at a mobile phone in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan (photo from janusz.kol/Shutterstock.com).





Tourism

With towering glacial mountains, unique limestone karst formations, and pristine forests abundant in wildlife, Guangxi and Yunnan attract huge numbers of domestic tourists each year. Many visitors come to enjoy the local culture, especially in Yunnan, which is the PRC's most ethnically diverse province. The PRC is looking to attract more international visitors by improving destination marketing and tourism services.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Shilin (Stone Forest), Yunnan (photo from iStock.com).
2. The Three Pagodas of Chongsheng Temple, Dali, Yunnan (photo from iStock.com).
3. Yangshuo, Guangxi (photo from iStock.com).
4. Aerial view of Lijiang (photo from iStock.com).





Transport

Since the 1990s, transport infrastructure has been a priority investment area for the PRC. Both Guangxi and Yunnan now have well-developed road and railway networks. Today, paved roads connect the vast majority of remote communities, helping to provide economic opportunities for rural families. The PRC is actively collaborating with its GMS partners to strengthen subregional railway and road linkages, with major investments planned for new GMS transport infrastructure.



► Clockwise from top:

1. Sunrise in Guilin (photo from iStock.com).
2. Tourist boats on the Li River, near Yangshuo (photo from byvalet/Shutterstock.com).
3. Inside the new high-speed train station in Kunming (photo from outcast85/Shutterstock.com).



Transport and Trade Facilitation

Guangxi and Yunnan are trade “gateways” connecting the PRC to the GMS countries and other Southeast Asian countries. Major exports include electrical machinery and agricultural products such as rubber and sugar. The PRC and Viet Nam have already initiated cross-border traffic rights for trucks and buses, and are now working together to develop more efficient inspection and quarantine procedures. Efforts are also under way to improve the customs and transport processes at land ports on the borders with the Lao PDR and Myanmar.

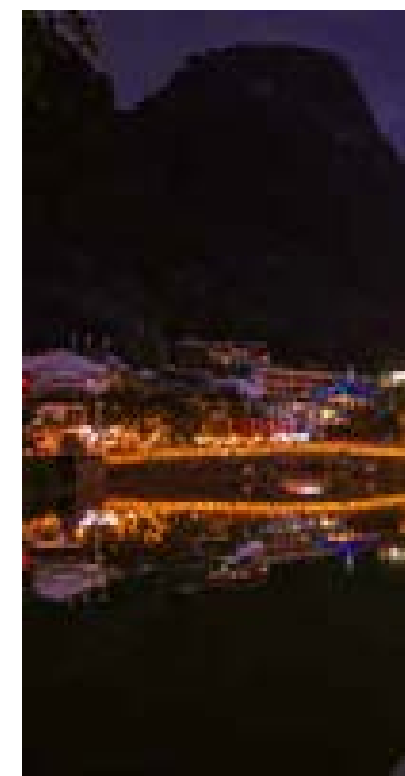
► **Left:** The Mohan–Boten border checkpoint between Yunnan Province, PRC and Luang Namtha Province, Lao PDR (photo from ADB). **Right:** Freight trucks line up to cross the PRC–Lao PDR border from the town of Mohan, Yunnan Province (photo from ADB).





Urban Development

In addition to the provincial capitals of Nanning and Kunming, both Guangxi and Yunnan have large secondary cities. Since the turn of the century, major investments in urban transport and housing have improved commerce and the quality of life in many locales. Today, urban development is intensifying in secondary cities and towns located along the economic corridors. Both Guangxi and Yunnan are diligently working to create better urban solid waste, wastewater, and flood-control facilities, and to manage their air pollution. The PRC is also actively sharing its urban development expertise and experience with the other GMS countries.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Jade Rooster Memorial Arch, central Kunming (photo from woratep/iStock.com).
2. The skyline of Kunming (photo from iStock.com).
3. Sunrise in Guilin (photo from iStock.com).
4. Yangshuo, Guangxi (photo from GuoZhong Hua/Shutterstock.com).
5. Illuminated buildings against the night sky, Nanning (photo from iStock.com).



A long-exposure photograph of a city at night. The background is a deep blue sky. In the lower right, a dark, multi-tiered temple tower with a pointed roof is visible. The foreground is filled with horizontal streaks of light in shades of red, orange, and yellow, suggesting traffic on a bridge or road. A small cluster of three bright white lights is visible in the middle ground.

Lao People's Democratic Republic



Overview

THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (LAO PDR) is the only landlocked country in Southeast Asia, and it has the smallest population of the six GMS countries. But it is rich in natural resources, and has benefited from vigorous economic growth in recent years thanks to its mining, agricultural, and energy exports. The country has made impressive progress in achieving many of its Millennium Development Goals. Poverty and hunger have been greatly reduced, and education and health outcomes have improved. Efforts to diversify the economy and strengthen connectivity and collaboration with its GMS and ASEAN partners should lead to continued growth and prosperity in the coming years.

◀ Patuxai (Victory Gate), in the center of Vientiane, capital of the Lao PDR (photo from ADB).

Agriculture

Although commercial farming is on the rise, agriculture in the Lao PDR is still mostly subsistence. Rice—especially sticky rice—is the major crop, and is planted on nearly three-quarters of the cultivated land. Other important products include maize, coffee, sugarcane, and cassava, as well as industrial trees such as rubber and eucalyptus. The Lao PDR is looking to boost the contribution of agriculture to rural poverty reduction, and is collaborating with its GMS partners to modernize and commercialize the sector. This collaboration includes revising its policies on cross-border agricultural trade to attract investment and boost exports.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Workers scattering cassava for drying at a farm in the Lao PDR (photo from ADB).
2. A cabbage farmer in Kongtoun village, Champasak Province (photo from ADB).
3. Traditional Lao cuisine (photo from iStock.com).
4. Farmers at a sugarcane plantation near northern Xieng Kok (photo from Paoloarsie/iStock.com).
5. Red and green berries of coffee trees grown in Paksong District, Champasak (photo from ADB).
6. A farmer smelling some green tea in Paksong District (photo from ADB).





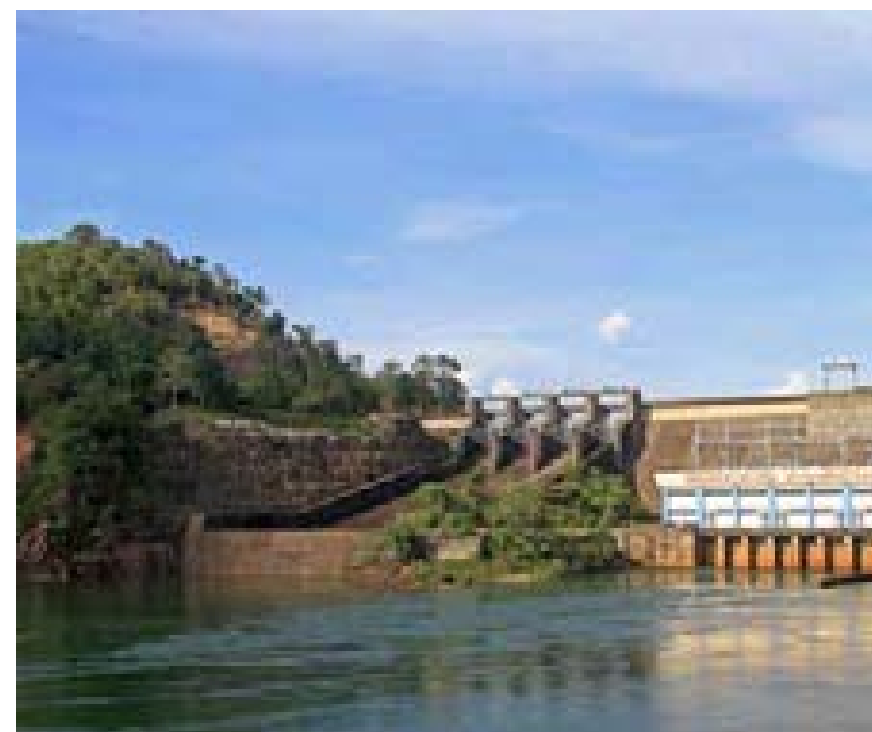
Energy

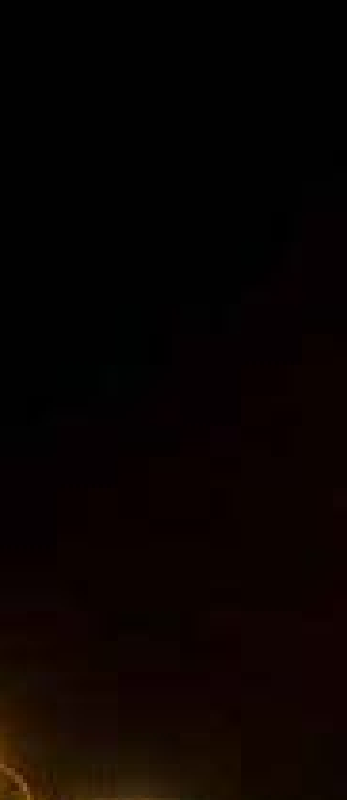
Utilizing its impressive water resources, the Lao PDR generates most of its electricity by hydropower, with 50 hydro dams in operation and more being built. The country intends to increase its electricity exports, and has plans to enhance its infrastructure for transmission to Cambodia, the PRC, Thailand, and Viet Nam. Meanwhile, the government's priority is to ensure that all domestic households have access to electricity, and it has made steady progress in this regard—92% of the population are now connected, from 15% 20 years ago.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Patuxai (Victory Gate) at night, Vientiane (photo from iStock.com).
2. The Nakai Reservoir in central Khammouane Province (photo from ADB).
3. Twilight in Luang Prabang (photo from Shutterstock.com).
4. Nam Ngum Dam, near Vientiane (photo from iStock.com).





Environment

The Lao PDR's landscape is dominated by rugged mountains and extensive rivers. In addition to water, the country is rich in natural resources such as minerals and forests, and has a great deal of biodiversity. In recent years, the Lao PDR has strengthened its biodiversity conservation efforts in important forest areas. Looking ahead, the country is aiming to establish better systems for controlling air and water pollution caused by agriculture and industry. With its GMS partners, the Lao PDR is also working on green freight solutions for developing more environmentally friendly transport.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Tad-Pa Suam waterfall, Champasak (photo from iStock.com).
2. Sea of clouds during the rainy season in northern Luang Prabang Province (photo from iStock.com).
3. Southern Lao PDR (photo from iStock.com).



Human Resource Development and Health

The Lao PDR views human resource development as essential for achieving its socioeconomic development objectives. National priorities include increasing investments in the sector and ensuring that opportunities for human resource development are accessible to all. The Lao PDR has been working to expand and improve technical and vocational education and training, as well as higher education. The country has made considerable progress in improving the health of its people in recent decades. Maternal and child mortality have been reduced, malaria deaths are on the decline, and vaccination coverage is increasing. Health priorities include achieving universal health coverage, improving cross-border disease control, and reducing malnutrition.

► Clockwise from top left:

1. Families at the monthly Mother and Child Health Check program in a resettlement village near the Nakai Reservoir (photo from ADB).
2. Technicians assembling electronic products at a factory in the Savan Park Special Economic Zone, in Savannakhet (photo from ADB).
3. Food and beverages served at the Champasak technical and vocational education and training campus, in central Pakse (photo from ADB).





Information and Communication Technology

Recognizing the importance of ICT to socioeconomic development and global connectivity, the Lao PDR has steadily improved its telecommunications infrastructure. More than 37% of the population now uses the internet through mobile broadband and fixed (wired) broadband, up from just 20% in 2015. Efforts are under way to further modernize the sector and expand its geographical reach. The targets include extending the telecommunications network to reach 91% of the villages and installing fiber-optic cables in all the country's districts. The government is also promoting the use of ICT in schools and exploring measures to ensure internet affordability.

► Clockwise from top left:

1. A woman chatting with her granddaughter via the internet in Luang Prabang (photo from Stefano Ember/Shutterstock.com).
2. A young Buddhist monk using a laptop inside a temple, Vientiane (photo from Richard Majchrzak/Shutterstock.com).
3. A Hmong girl in traditional dress taking a selfie in northeastern Xiangkhouang Province (photo from Nok Lek/Shutterstock.com).





Tourism

The Lao PDR's tourist attractions include World Heritage sites such as the historic town of Luang Prabang and the ancient Vat Phou Temple complex (in Champasak Province). The country's many ecotourism opportunities and vibrant capital city, Vientiane, also entice visitors from near and far. Of the GMS countries, the Lao PDR receives the highest proportion of international visitors relative to population size. National tourism priorities include local job creation, infrastructure improvement, and environmental sustainability.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Sunrise at the ruins of the Vat Phou temple complex, in Champasak (photo from Shutterstock.com).
2. Wat Xieng Thong temple, Luang Prabang (photo from iStock.com).
3. Celebrating the New Year in Luang Prabang (photo from kengphotostock/Shutterstock.com).
4. Riverfront restaurant in Vang Vieng, Vientiane Province (photo from Alexander Mazurkevich/Shutterstock.com).



Transport

The Lao PDR is actively pursuing its goal of transitioning from a landlocked to a “land-linked” country. Significant progress has been made in improving the nation’s roads, waterways, and air-transport infrastructure in recent decades. Roads remain essential for the movement of goods and people, and the country is now benefiting from better road connectivity with its GMS neighbors. The Lao PDR recognizes the importance of efficient transport for achieving its Sustainable Development Goals. With support from its GMS partners, it has ambitious plans for developing an extensive railway system. The country is also looking to improve its rural road network and to climate-proof its transport infrastructure.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. The Second Thai–Lao Friendship Bridge (photo from iStock.com).
2. A truck on Asian Highway 131, in the Lao PDR’s central region (photo from ADB).
3. The 400-meter-long Thalang Bridge, which spans the Nakai Reservoir (photo from ADB).
4. An airplane on the tarmac at Luang Prabang Airport (photo from ADB).





Transport and Trade Facilitation

As a landlocked nation, the Lao PDR depends on trade with its GMS partners. Together, the PRC, Thailand, and Viet Nam receive more than 80% of the country's exports, including timber, electricity, agricultural products, and copper. These three countries provide an even higher proportion of the Lao PDR's imports. The government is preparing to launch a road-user charging system, and has simplified the clearance procedures at the Viet Nam border. Efforts are also under way to reduce logistics costs for freight transport and to ensure that the transport and trade of food products is safe and disease-free.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Trucks passing through the Lao PDR border checkpoint in Savannakhet near the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge (photo from ADB).
2. Aerial view of vehicles entering the Lao PDR border checkpoint at the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge (photo from ADB).
3. A customs official on the Savannakhet side of the border checkpoint between the Lao PDR and Thailand (photo from ADB).





Urban Development

In the Lao PDR, the urban areas are home to around 40% of the population. Vientiane is the only large city, with nearly a million people. The government is forging stronger linkages with towns and cities in neighboring countries by supporting the movement of goods and services along the GMS economic corridors. Its urban development goal is to create modern, livable, and environmentally friendly towns that preserve the country's unique cultural assets.



- Clockwise from top left:
1. Traditional festive lights in Luang Prabang (photo from iStock.com).
 2. A quay in Vientiane (photo from iStock.com).
 3. A street in Luang Prabang at sunset (photo from Shutterstock.com).
 4. A pathway around That Luang Lake, in Vientiane (photo from Shutterstock.com).





Myanmar



Overview

HAVING EMERGED FROM DECADES

of political and economic isolation, Myanmar is well on its way toward achieving economic growth and poverty reduction. With abundant natural resources, a youthful population, and a strategic location at the crossroads of Asia, the country has huge development potential. Elections held in November 2015 were an important milestone in the country's transition to democracy. The country is an active partner in GMS economic cooperation, with widespread reforms now under way to support broad-based, inclusive, and sustainable socioeconomic development. Myanmar's reintegration into the global economy presents unique opportunities for leveraging private sector growth to reduce poverty, share prosperity, and sustain the nationwide peace process. As Myanmar has been buoyed by a positive performance in recent years, combined with a raft of new social and economic policies and increased investments in infrastructure, health, education, and rural development, the outlook for its economy remains positive.

◀ Karaweik Palace, Yangon (photo from iStock.com).

Agriculture

With its large land area, fertile soil, and abundant water resources, Myanmar has great potential to become an agricultural powerhouse. Farming is the backbone of the economy, employing approximately 70% of the country's labor force and providing a major source of export earnings. GMS partners, especially the PRC and Thailand, are key markets for Myanmar's wide range of produce, including mainstays such as rice and maize. Increased agricultural productivity and profitability is a core national strategy for poverty reduction and food security. Sector priorities include improving food processing, storage, transportation and logistics facilities; scaling up irrigation; increasing access to financial, marketing, research, and extension services; developing high-quality seeds; and attracting greater foreign investment.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Rice paddies outside Yangon (photo from ADB).
2. Dried maize hanging (photo from iStock.com).
3. Woman selling vegetables at a rural market near Bagan, Mandalay Region (photo from Nikada/iStock.com).
4. Woman harvesting tomatoes in the floating gardens of Inle Lake, Shan State (photo from iStock.com).
5. Farmers planting rice near Keng Tung, Shan State, in the northeast (photo from Anandoart/iStock.com).





Energy

Myanmar is well positioned to increase its energy-generation capacity due to its abundant resources, especially water (for hydropower) and natural gas. Energy exports to other GMS countries and farther afield make a huge contribution to the national economy. The government has prioritized energy access for rural households as an essential aspect of the country's development, with the goal of universal energy access by 2030. Other priorities include promoting energy efficiency and conservation and scaling up renewable energy programs, such as solar mini-grids and micro-hydropower projects.

► **Left:** Illuminated Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon (photo from iStock.com). **Right:** Lawpita hydropower station, Kayah State, Myanmar (photo from Aung Myat/Shutterstock.com).





Environment

Myanmar is endowed with extensive forest, freshwater, and marine resources, as well as significant minerals, precious stones, oil, and gas. Often referred to as “the last frontier of biodiversity in Asia,” the country boasts a huge array of fauna and flora species. Myanmar has established a range of biodiversity priorities that includes forest restoration; the expansion of protected areas, including mangrove forests; the development of management plans for ecosystem-based fisheries; and the fight against illegal fishing in the Myeik Archipelago. Myanmar has also established a set of procedures for evaluating the environmental impact of development projects, one of many new initiatives to better balance environmental sustainability against the country’s recent rapid economic growth.

► Clockwise from top left:

1. Horseshoe Island, off the coast of southern Myanmar (photo from Shutterstock.com).
2. A barred eagle-owl (photo from iStock.com).
3. Rangoon creeper flowers in a Yangon park (photo from iStock.com).
4. The Kalaw Mountains, in Shan State (photo from Shutterstock.com).
5. Sunrise on the Irrawaddy River at Sagaing (photo from iStock.com).





Human Resource Development and Health

Myanmar's National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) sets out a road map for the transformational reform of the country's education system. The NESP emphasizes universal access to preschool and basic education, and makes a clear commitment to improving the quality of education through reforms of the curriculum, teacher education, and student assessment. Another priority is improving the quality of both higher education and technical and vocational education and training. Myanmar has also made significant gains in public health in recent years. Malaria mortality rates are down, infant and maternal health have improved, and immunization coverage has increased. In 2017, a new national health plan was launched that prioritizes universal health care as an integral part of Myanmar's road to sustainable growth and poverty reduction. Additional priorities include enhancing health sector capacity, controlling disease, and promoting healthy lifestyles.

► Clockwise from top left:

1. A worker at the Mandalay Royal Industrial Company, Mandalay Industrial Zone, Shan State (photo from ADB).
2. Making threads from lotus fibers at a factory in Mandalay (photo from iStock.com).
3. A woman inspecting water jugs at a pottery outlet on the Irrawaddy River, outside Mandalay (photo from Alan Tobey/iStock.com).
4. A class at the Government Technical High School in Nay Pyi Taw, the capital of Myanmar (photo from ADB).





Information and Communication Technology

Internet and mobile phone use has increased rapidly in Myanmar over the past 5 years, with investments continuing to improve access to ICT. Since the government reformed the telecommunications sector in 2014, the number of internet users is estimated to have increased rapidly from 2 million to more than 39 million, according to official figures. Network providers are now rolling out 4G connectivity and enhancing mobile applications for banking and financial technology, business, agriculture, and health services. Initiatives such as these are expected to create more affordable telecom services across the country and to boost economic growth and job creation.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Two girls using a tablet together (photo from Shutterstock.com).
2. Antennas on the roof of an apartment building in central Yangon (photo from ADB).
3. Buddhist novices in Yangon crowding around a woman to watch something on her mobile phone (photo from Blur Day Blur Night/ Shutterstock.com).
4. Information and communication technology in Yangon (photo from ADB).



Tourism

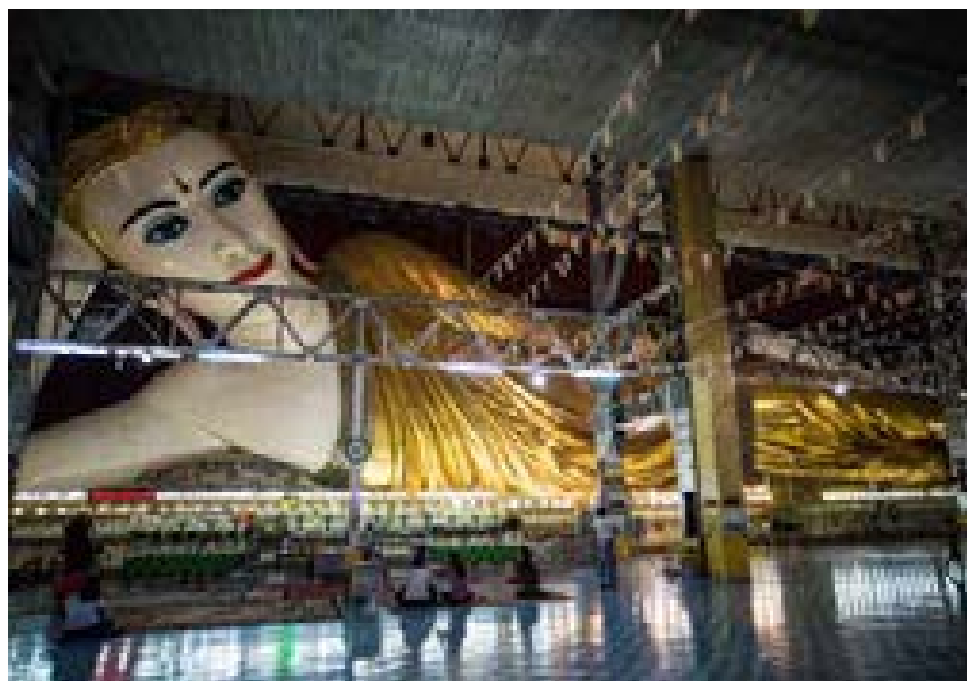
Since the government launched its economic and social reforms in 2011, tourism has taken off in Myanmar. Among the country's many wonders are the spectacular pagodas of Yangon, Bagan, and Mandalay; the numerous unspoiled beaches and islands in the south; and the stunning landscapes around Inle Lake. As an emerging destination, the country is working hard to develop the policies and infrastructure needed to lay a firm foundation for sustainable tourism growth. The country's tourism master plan has prioritized the strengthening of Myanmar's brand as a quality tourist destination and the provision of better training for workers in the tourism sector.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Sunrise landscape dotted with temples, Bagan (photo from iStock.com).
2. Mount Popa, topped by a monastery, in central Myanmar (photo from iStock.com).
3. Tourist looking at stupas at a Buddhist temple (photo from iStock.com).
4. The 65-meter-long Reclining Buddha at Chauk Htat Gyi Pagoda, Yangon (photo from ADB).
5. View of the Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon (photo from iStock.com).
6. Tourist cabins perched over the waters of Inle Lake (photo from iStock.com).





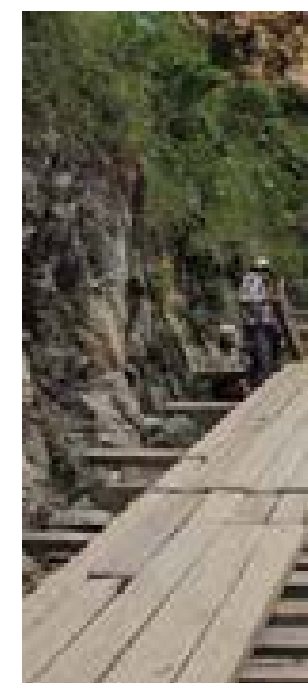
Transport

Since 2004, Myanmar has added 10,000 kilometers of major roads, in addition to expanding its railway network. Road improvements along key economic corridors have helped connect Myanmar with its GMS partners to the east, and with India to the west. As Myanmar is a strategic bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia, improving the quality and connectivity of its transport infrastructure is vital for the country's development and for that of the wider GMS region. With support from its GMS partners, Myanmar is looking to scale up infrastructure investments to enhance its roads, railways, seaports, and airports.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Yangon Central Railway Station, with the Shwedagon Pagoda in the background (photo from ADB).
2. Evening traffic in Yangon (photo from ADB).
3. A bridge under construction in Mandalay (photo from iStock.com).
4. A temporary wooden surface being built over the road linking the towns of Kale and Hakha, in the northwest (photo from ADB).
5. Passengers at Yangon International Airport (photo from ADB).





Transport and Trade Facilitation

Nearly two-thirds of Myanmar's trade is within the GMS, with the PRC and Thailand as its most important trading partners. These two countries provide a wide range of imports to Myanmar and purchase a major share of its petroleum, mineral, and agricultural exports. Myanmar and Thailand are focusing efforts on a bilateral agreement to reduce the time, costs, and paperwork associated with cross-border transport. Myanmar is also rolling out an automated system for customs clearance, and is working on a "single-window" system for trade documentation. Myanmar is also exploring possibilities for strengthening trade linkages with GMS partners through the development of special economic zones.

► Clockwise from left:

1. A ship unloading cargo at Bo Aung Kyaw Port, in Yangon (photo from ADB).
2. View of downtown Yangon, with the Pegu and Myitkaka rivers converging in the background to form the Yangon River (photo from ADB).
3. The Myanmar–Thailand border crossing at Mae Sai, in northern Thailand (photo from ADB).





Urban Development

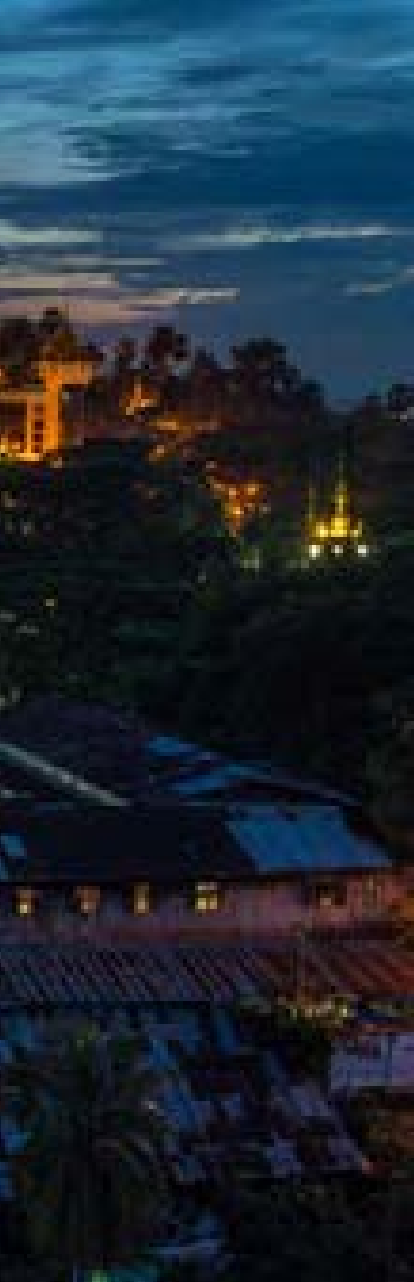
Approximately one in three people in Myanmar lives in urban areas. Infrastructure in the country's two largest cities, Yangon and Mandalay, and in many other towns is in need of rehabilitation. Increasing urbanization is placing additional pressure on urban planning, housing, transport systems, and municipal management. The country is working with international partners and investors to modernize major cities, regional centers, and towns along the GMS economic corridors. Priorities include upgrading public services and utilities, creating more public spaces, and conserving cultural heritage sites.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Shwedagon Pagoda at dusk (photo from iStock.com).
2. View of Yangon (photo from iStock.com).
3. Traffic congestion in downtown Yangon (photo from ADB).
4. Downtown Yangon at dusk (photo from Phuong D. Nguyen/Shutterstock.com).







Thailand



Overview

THAILAND HAS MADE REMARKABLE development progress, and recently attained upper-middle-income status. The country has dramatically reduced poverty and greatly improved its social services. Despite an economic slowdown in recent years, Thailand remains the second-largest economy in Southeast Asia. The country actively promotes GMS cooperation and integration, and is a crucial partner for the less-developed GMS countries. It recently embarked on widespread economic and policy reforms under “Thailand 4.0” and guided by the *20-Year National Strategy, 2017–2036*. The national strategy will help address inequalities and achieve sustainable development by seeking to (i) enhance and develop the potential of human capital, (ii) ensure justice and reduce social disparities, (iii) strengthen the economy and enhance competitiveness on a sustainable basis, (iv) promote green growth for sustainable development, (v) bring about national stability for national development toward prosperity and sustainability, and (vi) enhance the efficiency of public sector management and promote good governance.

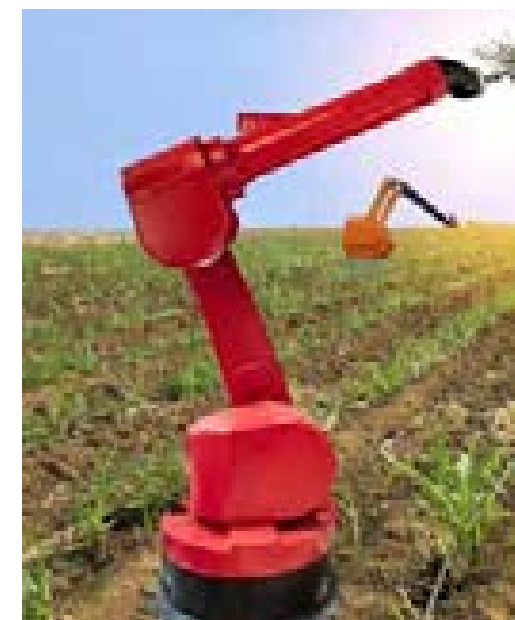
◀ A long-tail boat at sunset in southern Thailand (photo from iStock.com).

Agriculture

Thailand's fertile lands and advanced farming systems have made it the biggest agricultural producer and exporter in the GMS. The country is renowned worldwide for the quality of its rice, pineapples, dried fruits, and aquatic products; and it is a leading global supplier of rubber. The government is making strides to improve food safety and promote organic farming. Thailand actively shares its agriculture expertise with its GMS partners; and its agribusiness companies are major investors in the subregion as well.

► Clockwise from top left:

1. Farmers harvesting rice in Nong Chok, an outlying district of Bangkok, the capital of Thailand (photo from surachetkamsuk/iStock.com).
2. Hillside cultivation with a waterfall in the background, Chiang Mai Province, northern Thailand (photo from iStock.com).
3. A weir in Chiang Mai Province (photo from iStock.com).
4. Traditional fishing in Thailand (photo from iStock.com).
5. Smart robots being used on farms to detect weeds and spray chemicals (photo from iStock.com).
6. Pineapple farm in Hua Hin, Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, southern Thailand (photo from iStock.com).





Energy

Thailand has extensive energy resources such as oil, coal, and natural gas. However, due to a high domestic demand, it relies heavily on energy imports, such as hydroelectricity from neighboring Lao PDR. Domestic energy demand is forecast to increase dramatically in the coming decades, so Thailand is looking to secure its energy future by diversifying its power mix away from fossil fuel sources. The country is already a GMS leader in renewables, and is aiming to scale up its energy-efficiency programs. Another priority is lessening the environmental footprint of its energy sector.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Maintenance work on a wind turbine at the Theppana Wind Farm, in Chaiyaphum Province, northeast Thailand (photo from ADB).
2. Panels at a solar farm (photo from Shutterstock.com).
3. Bhumibol Bridge, also known as the "Industrial Ring Road Bridge," in Bangkok (photo from iStock.com).
4. The power plant at Srinakarin Dam, in mountainous Kachanaburi Province, central Thailand (photo from iStock.com).
5. A gas flame on an oil and gas platform in the Gulf of Thailand (photo from iStock.com).





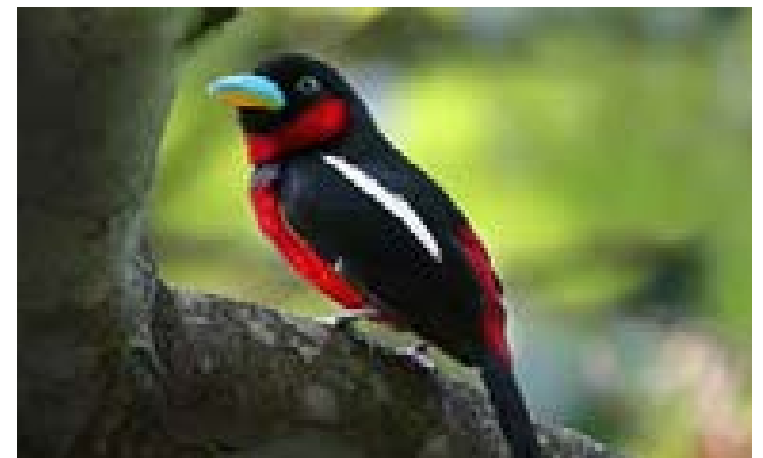
Environment

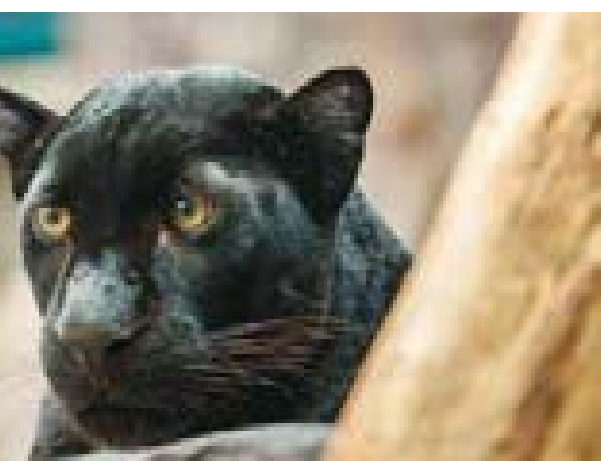
Although Thailand has extensively tapped into its natural resource base to spur economic development, the country still has abundant water, forest, fish, and wildlife resources. Following devastating floods in 2011, the government responded by prioritizing water management and flood prevention. Thailand is also exploring low-carbon development pathways such as “green freight” transport and environmentally friendly energy sources, including solar power. Cambodia and Thailand have recently initiated efforts to jointly protect important natural forests along their common borders.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Some of the 42 islands that make up Ang Thong National Marine Park, in the Gulf of Thailand (photo from iStock.com).
2. Mountainous rain forest near the town of Krabi, on southern Thailand's west coast (photo from iStock.com).
3. Aerial view of a mountain landscape (photo from iStock.com).
4. A black panther (photo from Shutterstock.com).
5. Black-and-red broadbill (photo from iStock.com).





Human Resource Development and Health

Human resource development will play a key role in Thailand's achieving its goal of higher-income status by 2032. In recognition of this, enhancing human capital is at the center of the country's *20-Year National Strategy, 2017–2036*. Thailand is actively working with its GMS partners to improve education and address human trafficking issues. The country is also leading subregional cooperation on cross-border migrant health issues, including disease control. Addressing antimicrobial resistance and improving road safety are two other national health priorities.

► Clockwise from left:

1. University students in Bangkok taking an exam (photo from Chinnapong/Shutterstock.com).
2. A man in his boat after a long day of fishing (photo from Zodebala/iStock.com).
3. Students receiving practical training at an aviation college (photo from iStock.com).
4. Scientist working in a laboratory (photo from Shutterstock.com).





Information and Communication Technology

Thailand is a GMS leader in ICT, with an extensive telecommunications network and widespread penetration of internet and phone services. The country is actively pursuing its vision of a “digital economy” that will spur productivity and competitiveness. Steps toward this goal include rolling out 4G wireless broadband infrastructure and promoting the use of ICT by businesses, both large and small. The country hopes to provide 40 million citizens with internet access by 2018.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Tobacco farmer using a tablet, a sign of the growing presence of technology in agriculture (photo from Shutterstock.com).
2. An internet cafe at CentralWorld mall, Bangkok (photo from ADB).
3. Communication towers with antenna (photo from Shutterstock.com).
4. Skytrain commuters absorbed in their mobile phones (photo from ADB).



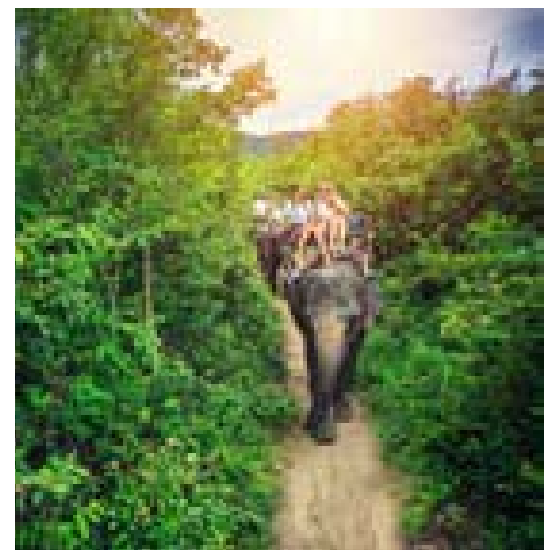
Tourism

Thailand has long been a major tourist destination, and these days it is one of the most visited countries in the world. With its shopping, cuisine, and vibrant urban setting, Bangkok is hugely popular. Many visitors also enjoy other destinations, including the ancient capital Ayutthaya, Khao Yai National Park, the northern city of Chiang Mai, and the pristine beaches of islands such as Phuket and Samui. Thailand's tourism priorities include developing quality services that appeal to higher-spending markets, promoting their culture, and ensuring environmental sustainability.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Beach on Phuket Island, southern Thailand (photo from iStock.com).
2. Night market in Bangkok (photo from iStock.com).
3. Tourists riding elephants (photo from iStock.com).
4. Outdoor restaurant on Bangkok's famous Khao San Road (photo from Rolf_52/iStock.com).
5. Wat Arun, the "Temple of Dawn" next to the Chao Phraya River, Bangkok (photo from Shutterstock.com).
6. Floating market in Damnoen Saduak, Ratchaburi Province (photo from lzfiStock.com).





Transport

Thailand has well-developed basic infrastructure for air, land, and water transport. Its paved road network is extensive—over 200,000 kilometers—while railway connectivity will soon be upgraded with dual tracks throughout the country. In Bangkok, the “Skytrain” and underground metro system are being upgraded to address urban transport challenges. Thailand is looking to further modernize and expand its transport infrastructure. One major focus is rail, especially high-speed trains, with the intention of making Thailand into a trade hub for the GMS and countries beyond. Another priority is upgrading more roads to four-lane highways.



► Clockwise from top:

1. Bhumibol Bridge, Bangkok (photo from iStock.com).
2. The Skytrain in Bangkok (photo from ADB).
3. Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, one of the busiest airports in the world (photo from ADB).
4. An elevated pedestrian walkway in Bangkok (photo from ADB).
5. A highway curving through mountainous terrain (photo from ADB).



Transport and Trade Facilitation

Thailand conducts a lot of trade within the GMS. Its products such as rice, rubber, electrical appliances, and vehicles are exported throughout the subregion—and all over the world. Sea transport plays a major role in connecting Thailand with global markets, while road, rail, and air move goods and people within the subregion. As a quarter of its trade is intra-GMS, Thailand is a vitally important trading partner for the other countries in the subregion. Cooperating with its GMS partners, Thailand has simplified its procedures for cross-border trade and transport. It is also working to enhance its position as a logistics hub for the subregion.

► Clockwise from left:

1. A cargo ship at sunset at Bangkok's port, on the Chao Phraya River (photo from iStock.com).
2. Customs control in Mukdahan, on the Thai side of the Thailand–Lao PDR border (photo from ADB).
3. Bangkok's port, the city's main link for sea cargo (photo from ADB).





Urban Development

Thailand is the most urbanized country in the GMS, with just over half of the population living in towns and cities. Bangkok is the country's largest city, and an international hub for trade and travel. With most of Thailand's urban centers boasting high-quality roads and other infrastructure, the focus in recent years has been on improving environmental sustainability and enhancing economic opportunities. The country's 10 special economic zones and 100+ industrial zones have helped drive employment and trade in many secondary towns and cities, including those in border areas near Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Malaysia, and Myanmar.

► Clockwise from top:

1. Aerial view of a large traffic circle in Thonburi, Bangkok (photo from iStock.com).
2. Nighttime view of Bangkok with the Chao Phraya River (photo from iStock.com).
3. Heavy traffic on Yaowarat Road, in Bangkok's Chinatown district (photo from SeanPavonePhoto/iStock.com).







Viet Nam



Overview

OVER THE PAST FEW DECADES, economic and political reforms have transformed Viet Nam from being one of the world's poorest to a lower-middle-income country. During this period, its economy has been among the fastest-growing in the world. Poverty rates have been dramatically reduced, and there have been major improvements in education, health, and infrastructure. Nearly the entire population now has access to electricity. GMS cooperation plays an important role in Viet Nam's development. Viet Nam is looking to develop a more dynamic market economy that can compete globally and deliver sustained and equitable growth. Other national priorities include achieving environmental sustainability, addressing climate change challenges, and ensuring that development gains better reach ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups.

◀ Turtle Tower lit up at night behind Hoan Kiem Lake, Ha Noi, Viet Nam (photo from Karasev Victor/Shutterstock.com).

Agriculture

Viet Nam has made great progress in agriculture over the past 30 years, and it is now a leading global exporter of rice, coffee, pepper, cassava, and rubber. Viet Nam's agribusinesses are active investors in the GMS, particularly in Cambodia, the Lao PDR, and Myanmar.

The government's agricultural priorities include using land and water resources more sustainably, improving food safety, and focusing on higher-value crops. Viet Nam is also building climate resilience in the agriculture sector, especially to prepare for the projected rise in the sea levels of the productive Red River and Mekong deltas.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Terraced rice fields in Mu Cang Chai, a mountainous district of Yen Bai Province, in northern Viet Nam (photo from iStock.com).
2. Valley under rice cultivation in Viet Nam's Lang Son Province, which borders Guangxi in the PRC (photo from iStock.com).
3. Jars of coffee for sale in Ha Noi (photo from brians101/iStock.com).
4. A bowl of pho beef soup (photo from iStock.com).





Viet Nam

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Energy

With significant coal, oil, and natural gas resources, as well as a large hydropower system, Viet Nam is mostly energy self-sufficient. The country also has untapped renewable energy potential from biomass, solar, and wind sources. It has made excellent progress in ensuring rural access to electricity, with almost 100% of households now connected. Looking ahead, Viet Nam has new policies and strategies in place for increasing renewable energy production and improving energy efficiency.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Ho Chi Minh City at night (photo from iStock.com).
2. An offshore wind farm in the south of Viet Nam (photo from Shutterstock.com).
3. A hydroelectric power station in Mai Chau Valley, in the north (photo from iStock.com).





Environment

Viet Nam's forested mountain ranges cover much of the country before giving way to the flatlands and waterways of the Mekong Delta, in the far south. The Mekong Delta is the country's "rice bowl," but it also has much biodiversity, including many aquatic species. In recent years, Viet Nam has made major investments in biodiversity conservation. It has also implemented a national payment scheme for users of forest ecosystem services—such as hydropower companies that rely on water—to compensate local communities for protecting forest watersheds. Vulnerable to sea-level rises, droughts, and floods, Viet Nam is strengthening its climate change resilience.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Panoramic view of a lake (photo from iStock.com).
2. Stalactites and stalagmites in an illuminated cave in Ha Long Bay, in the northeast (photo from iStock.com).
3. Community members of Ma Cooih commune patrol a forest in Quang Nam Province (photo from ADB).
4. Mountainous terrain near the town of Sapa, Lao Cai Province, northwestern Viet Nam (photo from iStock.com).





Human Resource Development and Health

Human resource development has helped drive Viet Nam's impressive economic growth in recent decades. Furthering human resource development is a key pillar of the country's socioeconomic development strategy. Priorities include strengthening higher education and vocational training, and investing more in science and technology. Aided by its strong grassroots health network, Viet Nam has made impressive progress in terms of public health. Infant and child mortality rates, as well as maternal mortality ratio, are greatly reduced, and life expectancy continues to improve. The government is boosting its public health spending as the country continues its march toward universal coverage.

► Clockwise from top left:

1. A chemistry class at the Dong Tien Secondary School, Pho Yen District, in the northeastern province of Thai Nguyen (photo from ADB).
2. Salt field in Khanh Hoa Province, on the South-Central Coast (photo from iStock.com).
3. A mother and her baby at Ngoc Hoi District Hospital, in Kon Tum Province, in the Central Highlands (photo from ADB).
4. Production line at a rice cracker factory in Trang An, Ninh Binh Province, in the north (photo from ADB).





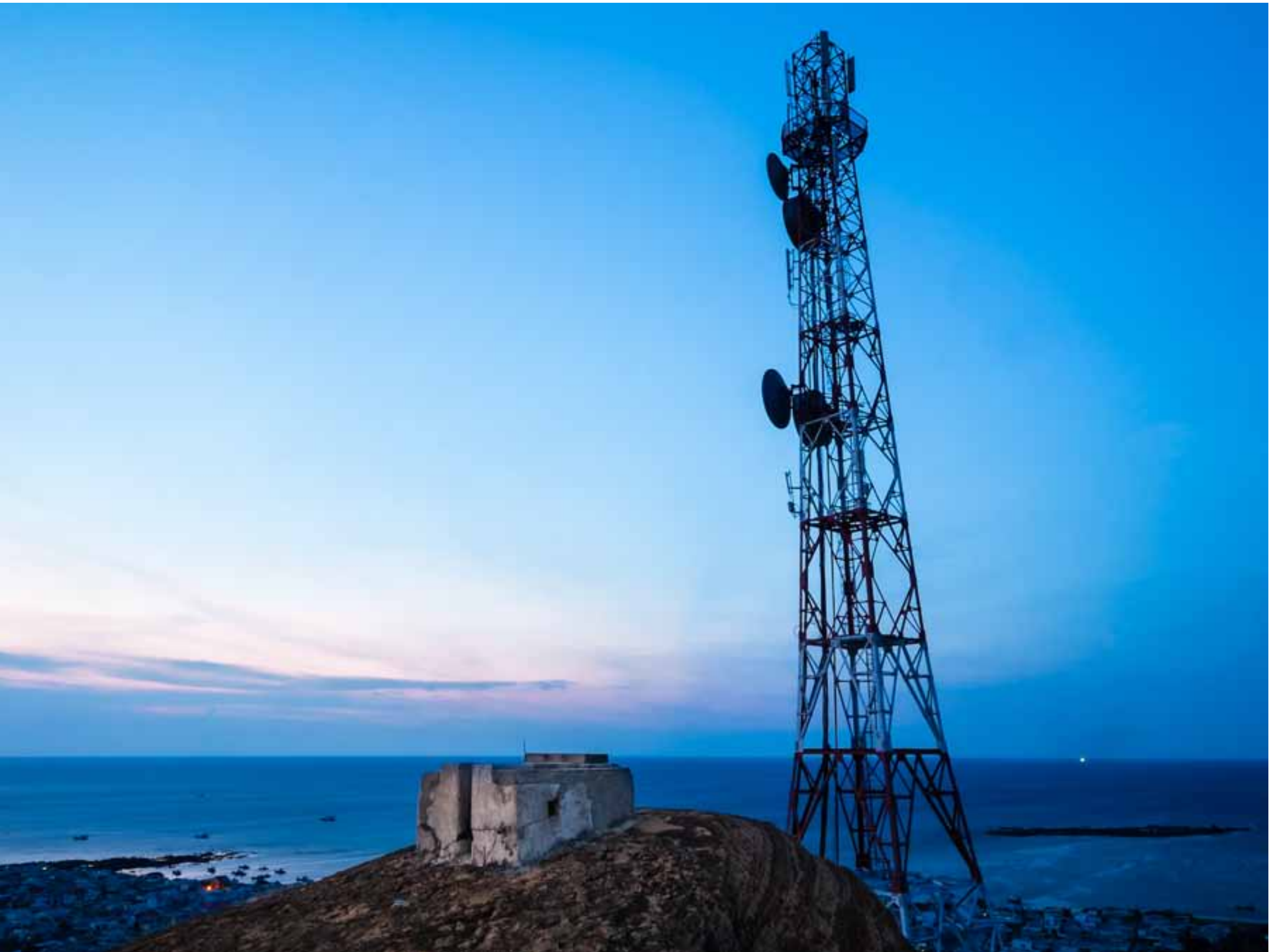
Information and Communication Technology

Viet Nam recognizes that ICT has a vital role to play in helping the country achieve its socioeconomic development targets. Recent investments in telecommunications infrastructure have increased access to mobile phone and internet services, with almost half of the country's population now using the internet. Viet Nam has ambitious plans to further develop this sector, including investing in fiber-optic cables and expanding 4G internet services. The country is also looking to increase the use of ICT in education and government.

► Clockwise from top left:

1. Teenagers using mobile phones in a Ha Noi park (photo from vinhdav/iStock.com).
2. A communications tower on Phu Quy Island, Binh Thuan Province, Viet Nam (photo from Shutterstock.com).
3. A server mainboard, Ho Chi Minh City (photo from ndquang/Shutterstock.com).





Tourism

With its rich culture and abundant historical and natural assets, Viet Nam now draws more than 10 million international visitors per year. Among its leading attractions are the stunning limestone pillars of Ha Long Bay, the beach resorts of Phu Quoc Island, and the Imperial City in Hue. The two main cities—Ho Chi Minh and Ha Noi—are also popular destinations. Viet Nam is trying to increase tourism's contributions to the economy by promoting investments in the hospitality industry and targeting higher-spending markets. It is also prioritizing better tourism site protection and management.



► Clockwise from top:

1. A panoramic view of Ha Long Bay from a junk boat (photo from iStock.com).
2. Eating fresh seafood at the Duong Dong night market, Phu Quoc Island, off the southern coast of Viet Nam (photo from AsianDream/iStock.com).
3. A beach on Phu Quoc Island on a sunny day (photo from iStock.com).
4. An entrance to the walled Hue Imperial City (photo from iStock.com).



Transport

In recent years, Viet Nam has invested substantially in transport infrastructure, and is now reaping the benefits. Today, the country's road network provides rural communities with better access to markets, helping to reduce poverty. New roads, seaports, and airports have stimulated regional integration and trade, and the government has ambitious plans to further modernize and enlarge the transport infrastructure. Priorities include upgrading and expanding highways and railways, building a new international airport near Ho Chi Minh City, and creating metro systems. Viet Nam is also actively looking to climate-proof its transport investments.

► Clockwise from left:

1. Nhat Tan Bridge, over the Red River (photo from ADB).
2. Port in Ha Long city (photo from iStock.com).
3. A new 80-kilometer road between Dong Ha and Lao Bao, which has cut a 5-hour trip to 90 minutes (photo from ADB).





Transport and Trade Facilitation

Viet Nam is a major global exporter of rice and other agricultural products. The country relies on its GMS partners for more than a third of its imports, and its biggest trading partner is the PRC. The country is now working with its GMS partners to ensure safer and more efficient cross-border transport and trade procedures. For instance, it now has a “single-stop” inspection system at the Lao Bao–Dasavanh border crossing with the Lao PDR, and has been working with the PRC and the Lao PDR to protect crops, livestock, and consumers against trade-related health hazards.

► Clockwise from left:

1. A cargo ship, Port of Hai Phong, Hai Phong City (photo from ADB).
2. Baskets of newly caught fish awaiting transport in Lagi, a beach town in Binh Thuan Province, on Viet Nam's South-Central Coast (photo from duybox/iStock.com).
3. The checkpoint at Lao Bao, on the border with the Lao People's Democratic Republic (photo from ADB).
4. Shipping containers, Port of Hai Phong (photo from ADB).





Urban Development

Viet Nam is the only GMS country that has two primary cities: Ha Noi in the north and Ho Chi Minh in the south. Although urban population growth has surged during the past quarter century, nearly two-thirds of Viet Nam's people still live in the countryside. Viet Nam has a long-term strategy of building a national network of modern urban centers. Currently, much effort is going into developing the country's secondary cities, where the government and partners are working together to enhance basic infrastructure, improve climate resilience and environmental management, and stimulate economic growth.



► Clockwise from top left:

1. Aerial view of Ho Chi Minh City (photo from iStock.com).
2. Apartment houses reflected in Tinh Bien Lake, Ha Noi (photo from iStock.com).
3. Ha Noi from a distance (photo from iStock.com).
4. Sunset in Ha Noi (photo from iStock.com).



Greater Mekong Subregion: Twenty-Five Years of Partnership

This publication celebrates 25 years of economic cooperation in the Greater Mekong Subregion. It presents an overview of the history, evolution, and achievements of the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program through a broad observation of each member country's progress and priorities in key areas of sustainable growth and development.

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ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 67 members—48 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.



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