

Mekong- Ganga Cooperation

[UPSC Notes]

What is Mekong- Ganga Cooperation?

Mekong-Ganga Cooperation is the cooperation among 6 member countries that are- India and 5 ASEAN countries- Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to encourage culture and commerce among them.

- Mekong Ganga Cooperation was established on 10, November 2000 at the First MGC Ministerial Meeting at Vientiane, Laos.
- There are mainly 4 areas of cooperation in Mekong Ganga Cooperation are- Culture, Education, Transportation, and Tourism.
- It is named after two Civilizational rivers that are the Ganga and the Mekong.

Mekong River

- Mekong River is a transboundary river in East Asia and Southeast Asia.
- The Mekong river is the 12th longest river in the world and the 6th longest in Asia.
- The length of the Mekong River is 4,909 km and it drains an area of about 795,000 km² and annually discharges about 475 km³ of water.
- The Mekong river originated from the Tibetan plateau and runs through six countries that are -China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Mekong- Ganga Cooperation Members

Mekong Ganga Cooperation consists of six countries:

1. India
2. Cambodia
3. Laos
4. Myanmar
5. Thailand
6. Vietnam.

Objectives of Mekong- Ganga Cooperation

- To enhance solidarity, friendship, and cooperation.
- To develop closer contacts and better understanding among Mekong Ganga Cooperation members.
- To promote inter-state movement and transit.
- Transmitting goods and peoples in the region.
- Infrastructural development in the areas of the Mekong Ganga basin.

- Encourage to eradicate poverty.

Structure of Mekong- Ganga Cooperation

The formal structure of the Mekong Ganga Cooperation is yet to evolve properly but the Ministerial Meetings of Mekong Ganga Cooperation would be held annually with the Annual Ministerial Meetings (AMM) as approved by MGC in a preliminary concept paper. The chairmanship of Mekong Ganga Cooperation will be rotated in alphabetical order among the MGC members and to carry out the coordination and implementation of the cooperation plan, the country which serves as chairman shall also act as secretariat.

Working Mechanism of Mekong- Ganga Cooperation

The working mechanism of Mekong Ganga Cooperation included the Annual Ministerial Meetings, Senior Officials Meetings (SOM), and the 5 working groups are-

- Education working group
- Tourism working group
- Culture working group
- Communication working group
- Plans of action working group

The function of the above working group is to look after the Cooperatives areas of the Mekong Ganga Cooperation.

Mekong- Ganga Cooperation Activities

- At the first inaugural meeting of Mekong Ganga Cooperation in November 2020, it was realized that the first step on a road that will lead to greater networking of communications, transport, and infrastructure development is the development of tourism, culture, and human resources.
- The Mekong Ganga Cooperation is conducting strategic studies for joint marketing in the field of tourism. To facilitate the travel of the people in the region, and bolster multimodal communication as well as transportation links to improve travel and tourism and Cultural-Religious package tours, Mekong Ganga Cooperation is launching the Mekong- Ganga Tourism Investment Guide.
- Mekong Ganga Cooperation member countries are committed to developing the 'East-West Corridor' and the 'Trans-Asian Highway' transport network in the field of infrastructure development.
- Once the Trans-Asian Highway project is completed. It is expected to link Singapore with New Delhi in South Asia via Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City, Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Vientiane, Yangon, Mandalay, and Kalembo, Tamu, Dhaka, and Kolkata.
- Air services and linkages and Information Technology infrastructure and networks are the other areas of cooperation.
- The grouping of Mekong Ganga Cooperation members are also undertaking joint research in the field of music, dance, and theatre forms and conducting

roundtables for journalist, writers, and expert in various field like literature, health, etc. in the field of culture

- On a commercial basis, member countries participate in book fairs.
- They also look after the conservation, preservation, and protection of heritage sites.
- The classics of Mekong Ganga Cooperation(MGC) countries are to be translated into other MGC countries' languages.
- The establishment of networking and Twinning arrangements among universities in the region is also envisaged by the Mekong Ganga Cooperation.

Mekong- Ganga Cooperation Plan of Action 2019-2022

At the 10th Mekong Ganga Cooperation Ministerial Meeting, the MGC Plan of Action (PoA) 2019-22 was adopted by the members. On its official website, the Minister of External Affairs has published the plan of action which emphasize the initiative to heighten cooperation among member countries in the following sector-

1. Cultural Cooperation

- Organize a textile exhibition at MGC Asian Traditional Textile Museum (ATTM) along with cultural activities to showcase the varied hand-woven fabrics of the Mekong Ganga Cooperation countries.
- India offers 10 scholarships for training in museology and conservation techniques at the National Museum Institute, New Delhi to promote capacity building and exchange best practices in the preservation of historical and cultural monuments.
- Establishment of a Common Archival Resource Center (CARC) at Nalanda University.
- Cooperate in the field of radio and television broadcasting for the promotion of cultural tourism among Mekong Ganga Cooperation countries.

2. Tourism Cooperation

- Organization of food festivals to popularise the rich culinary traditions of Mekong Ganga Cooperation countries.
- Encourage travel agencies to come up with tour packages for thematic circuits.
- Encourage the exchange of students through the offer of scholarships for diploma and certificate courses in Tourism and Travel Management Hospitality Management etc.

3. Cooperation in Education

- To enhance utilization by students from Mekong countries, India Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) offered 50 Mekong Ganga Cooperation scholarships.
- The exchange of faculty and students among national institutions promotes training in the traditional system of medicine.

4. Cooperation in Public Health and Traditional Medicine

- At the request of Mekong countries, India will send Ayurveda specialists under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program.

5. Cooperation in Agriculture and Allied sector

- Organize a workshop on sustainable fisheries and dairy.
- Organize a workshop on the preservation of rice germplasm and productivity enhancement.

6. Cooperation in Water Resource Management

- To exchange the experience and best practices in the farming community and Water Resource Management, India will conduct training programs and workshops.

7. Cooperation in Science and Technology

- To promote social innovation in agriculture, transport, e-commerce, Information, and Communication Technology, health, environment, etc; Host an Innovation Forum in one of the Mekong Ganga Cooperation countries.

8. Cooperation in Transport and Communications

- To promote e-Commerce as well as social and cultural exchange, enhanced the connectivity and cross-border Information and Communication Technology Services.

9. Cooperation in MSMEs

- Organize a Mekong Ganga Cooperation Trade Fair in any of the member countries focusing on MSMEs.
- A special focus on youth and women empowerment enhanced Cooperation in the MSMEs sector among the Mekong Ganga Cooperation countries.
- Organize a Mekong Ganga Cooperation Business Forum focusing on MSMEs.

10. Skill Development

- On the topics related to MGC areas of cooperation as well as other relevant issues, annual training programs are organized.
- Organize training and scholarship programs in the areas of national accounts statistics and large-scale socio-economic sample surveys for the Mekong Ganga Cooperation countries.