

Dream Takes Wing as ASEAN Steps Forward

The Vision behind the Southern Economic Corridor



After the opening ceremony, people start to move down the Tsubasa Bridge.

A LONG-AWAITED BRIDGE TO CROSS THE GREAT RIVER

It was a week before Cambodian New Year. On April 6th, 2015, 10,000 people celebrated the opening of the Tsubasa Bridge across the Mekong River near Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. Joining the throngs of locals were important national figures, including Prime Minister Hun Sen and then-Minister for Public Works and Transport Tram Iv Tek, as well as Akihiko Tanaka, then-president of JICA, and Akihiro Nishimura, Japan's Vice-Minister for Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. By the following day, the bridge had become a part of the local life: Cars and motorcycles zipped back and forth, some stopping in the middle to enjoy the magnificent landscape of the Great River. Merchants were selling bottled water and lotus seeds in the pedestrian lane while cars, trucks, and tuk-tuks passed by.

The bridge is named after its shape, which looks like two birds side by side taking wing – “tsubasa” in Japanese. Before the bridge was built, the only way to reach the opposite bank was to wait hours for a ferry. Now, people can cross the river without waiting, regardless of the time of the day. The bridge is one of the most recent examples of Japan's development aid supporting transportation infrastructure. Japan has provided its assistance to build more than 2,000 bridges around the world as ODA projects, along with many roads, railways, ports, and airports. Two other bridges that Japan built in Cambodia—the Nihon Bridge in Phnom Penh and the Kizuna Bridge in Kompong Cham—also have names derived from Japanese: “Nihon” means “Japan” and “kizuna” means “bonds.” The Kizuna Bridge appears on a postage stamp and a banknote as a symbol of

The Corridor from east to west: different economic situations united for a common goal



Thailand's highway reflects the country's rapid growth.



A long line of vehicles waiting to go through the Viet Nam - Cambodia border control.



Roads in Viet Nam are well maintained.

Japanese cooperation and friendship.

Phnom Penh is situated in the middle of the Southern Economic Corridor, a series of geographically connected highway projects supported by ODA from Japan. The Corridor passes through four southern ASEAN countries: Viet Nam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar. The 10 member countries of ASEAN, with a combined population of 652 million, are experiencing rapid economic growth. The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community in late 2015 created more opportunities for companies wishing to profit from the different strengths of each country.

OPEN FRONTIER TOWARD A NEW FUTURE

Let's journey through the Southern Economic Corridor from its eastern end in Viet Nam. The Corridor starts in Vung Tau, a famous bathing spot for local residents. Under French colonization, the little peninsula was called Cap Saint Jacques, and it became a major shipping port. Even though it is 100 km away from the largest city in the country, it is still one of Viet Nam's most important trading ports. JICA provided loans for the construction of this port as well as the Phu My thermal power plant situated near by.

A two-hour drive from the port brings you to the famous City of Woods, now called Ho Chi Minh City. After a brief period of Japanese occupation prior to the end of the Second World War, the country went through a series of war until the city, then called Saigon, had been liberated in 1975. Some forty years after the end of the war, the country now enjoys an annual GDP growth rate of about 6%. Another two-hour drive on wide and well-maintained roads takes you to the village of Moc Bai on the border with Cambodia. The long lines of freight vehicles waiting to pass through the border gate are a testament to the importance of trade between the two countries.

Today, Cambodia is seen as a new “factory” of ASEAN. Its low labor costs increasingly attract international companies and the kingdom is gradually transitioning into an industrial economy after suffering two decades of civil war. Some goods are wholly produced in Cambodia while others are pre-

fabricated in Cambodia and manufactured in other countries. The Southern Economic Corridor is more important than ever for Cambodia, for it allows rapid transportation of goods from Cambodia to its neighbor countries for export from the ports of Viet Nam and Thailand. However, Cambodia's roads are not as developed as those of its neighbors. JICA helps maintain, repair, and expand some of the country's most important roads and bridges.

Next along the Southern Economic Corridor are the Mekong River and the Tsubasa Bridge. The ten-year construction project has delivered fast, reliable transportation across the river. The border between Cambodia and Thailand lies 400km away from Phnom Penh. A border gate designed to resemble a traditional Buddhist temple welcomes visitors to the Land of Smiles.

With its rapid growth, Thailand is currently leading the economic development of the region. JICA has committed to providing support to the Laem Chabang Industrial Estate project near the capital, Bangkok. International manufacturers who have established operations in Thailand, including Japanese companies, will find Laem Chabang and its trading port to be an ideal location to set up a plant. The last part of the Corridor will lead to Dawei, Myanmar. It is still under construction, but the Dawei Industrial Estate project, similar to the Laem Chabang project, is expected to create more opportunities for manufacturers as well as for the country itself.

The formation of the ASEAN Economic Community has created a single market and production base. The availability of workers and easier transportation of goods will enhance its competitiveness and stimulate the region's economy. In addition to the Southern Economic Corridor, JICA is currently providing economic and technical cooperation for projects under way in the East-West Economic Corridor, which connects Viet Nam, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar, as well as the Marine Economic Corridor, which covers five island countries. Once the Corridors reach their full potential, the ASEAN region will be united by reliable transportation infrastructure and will be well positioned to become a driving force in the world's economy. JICA remains committed to supporting the development of ASEAN countries.