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# Agartala - Akhaura project

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**Why is in news?** In Tripura-Bangladesh railway link, new opportunities and old connect

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina virtually **inaugurated a rail link connecting Northeast India with Bangladesh.**

The Agartala-Akhaura project will **cut down the travel time between Agartala and Kolkata** too, from 31 hours to 10 hours.

The project is **expected to boost tourism, trade, and people-to-people exchanges** between the two countries.

## **about the project:**

In the **12.24-km Agartala-Akhaura railway line**, 5.46 kilometres lie on the Indian side in Tripura, and 6.78 km in the Akhaura upa-zilla in Brahmanbaria district of Bangladesh.

The train will start from Agartala and move to Nischintapur, **on the Indian-Bangladesh border**, where the immigration checks will be held. The first station on the Bangladesh side will be Gangasagar.

After the trial run for passenger services is completed, full-fledged train services between Agartala-Akhaura and Agartala-Chittagong (Chattogram) are expected to commence.

The state has repeatedly expressed the hope that the project will eventually cover Dhaka and Kolkata.

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### **Funding of the project:**

The project, which had its **MoU signed in 2013**, started with Rs 972.52 crore in 2016, including Rs 580 crore sanctioned for work on the Indian side and Rs 392.52 crore for the Bangladesh side, however the budget was later revised twice due to cost escalation and other ancillary expenses.

The final project cost is estimated at Rs 1255.10 crore, with Rs 862.58 crore allocated for works on the Indian side alone. The **entire project cost is being funded by India**.

The **Ministry for Development of North East Region (DoNER)** funded the work on the Indian side, and the **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)** funded the expense for the Bangladesh side as '**Aid to Bangladesh**'.

The **Indian Railway Construction International Limited (IRCON)**, a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) under the Indian Railways, did the work on the Indian side, and Texmaco, a private Indian firm, implemented the work on the Bangladesh side.

Supposed to be completed in 2020, the project was **delayed over land acquisition issues and the Covid-19 pandemic**. It underwent at least three extensions in deadlines.

### **Importance of the project to Tripura:**

For land-locked Tripura, any connectivity project is of great practical significance.

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The project was **crucial for connectivity in the NE region** and would make Tripura the gateway for tourism.

This project will go down in golden letters in the history of Indo-Bangla relationship.

Tripura is going to be the **gateway for tourism and transport between India and Bangladesh**.

Due to the Agartala-Akhaura railway project, the **distance between Agartala and Kolkata will be effectively reduced** from 1600 km to 500 km.

However, connectivity with Bangladesh also holds emotional significance.

**Tripura shares an 856-km international border with Bangladesh**, the second highest after West Bengal.

The North Eastern state is surrounded by the country on all three sides except Assam on the fourth.

During the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war and the creation of Bangladesh, Tripura, a state which then had only 14 lakh people, sheltered nearly 15 lakh East Pakistani refugees.

It ran **at least 8 major muktijoddha (liberation warrior) training camps**. With the new connectivity project, people on both sides can now hope for closer and smoother ties.

### **Other projects run between India and Bangladesh:**

Both countries are **engaged in raising the connectivity among people** for a better future.

The cooperation of connectivity has come up with the idea of a railway link which will be useful in aspects like trade.

India and Bangladesh also **depend on connectivity for the evolution of trade in South Asia**.

**Indo – Pacific strategy** is a strategy which comprises the links between railways, shipping and air links and so on.

For **road transport**, there are **36 functional Land Customs Stations (LCSs) and 2 Integrated Check Posts (ICPs)** along the border, enabling the operationalization of goods transportation.

**Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT)** was signed in 1972 for the transportation of goods and keeping their respective waterways navigable while providing infrastructure facilities.

Connectivity through Coastal Waterways, facilitated by the **Coastal Shipping Agreement**, has enabled direct sea movement of containerized, bulk, and dry cargo between the two countries.

The **latest train service** is part of an ongoing effort to boost connectivity between India and Bangladesh over the past few years.

Three trains, the **Bandhan Express, the Maitree Express and the Mitali Express**, run between West Bengal and Bangladesh.

Both the governments decided to commence: **Dhaka-Siliguri-Gangtok-Dhaka and Dhaka-Siliguri-Darjeeling-Dhaka bus service** to enhance people to people contacts between both the countries and the trial run of Dhaka-Siliguri-Gangtok-Dhaka was also held in December 2019.

The **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA)** aims to enhance the road connectivity.

**The Khulna-Mongla Port Rail Line Project:** It has been implemented under Government of India concessional line of credit with a total project cost of \$388.92 million.

The project entails construction of approximately 65 km of broad gauge rail route between Mongla Port and the existing rail network in Khulna. With this, Mongla, the second largest port of Bangladesh, gets connected with the broad gauge railway network.

**Some of the other Cross border Connectivity Projects:**

**Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP):**

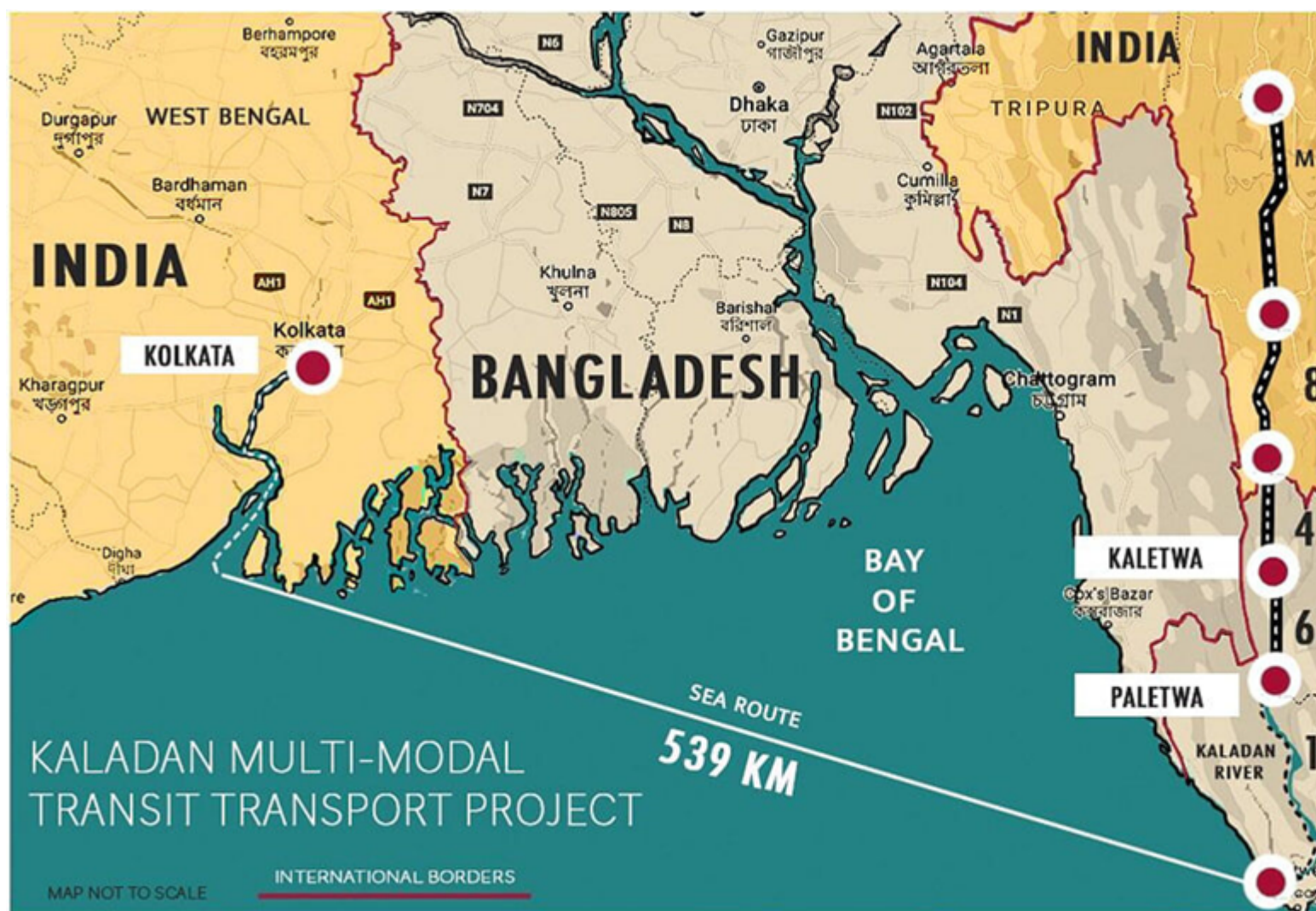
To develop **connectivity through water**, ASEAN and India are working on KMMTTP.

Initiated by the Indian government in 2008 and is **entirely funded by India**.

To seek an **alternative route through Myanmar** for the **transportation of goods to the northeast region of India**.

It connects **Kolkata in India to Sittwe and Paletwa in Myanmar** by sea and river respectively.

Alongside this initiative, India has contributed to build a sea link via Sittwe port in Myanmar in order to enable an alternative transit route through Bangladesh.



**Mekong-India Economic Corridor (MIEC):**

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It involves the **integration of four Mekong countries** – Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia - along with India, **connecting Ho Chi Minh City, Dawei, Bangkok, and Phnom Penh with Chennai**.

The corridor will provide opportunities for the participant countries to develop infrastructure, enhance their economic base with the region, and especially **reduce the transit distance between India and ASEAN countries**.



### India, Myanmar, Thailand highway:

India, Thailand and Myanmar are working on a **1,400-km-long highway** that **links the country with Southeast Asia by land** to give a boost to trade, business, health, education and tourism ties among the three countries.

The projects are **funded by Government of India under Grant Assistance to the Government of Myanmar**.

The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway is a highway under construction **under India's Look East Policy** that will connect Moreh, India with Mae Sot, Thailand via Myanmar.

The road will **boost the trade and commerce in the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area, and with the rest of Southeast Asia**.

India has also **proposed extending the highway to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam**.

Besides this, the India, Myanmar, and Thailand Motor Vehicles Agreement (IMT MVA) is in the final stage.

On realization, this will become the first-ever cross border facilitation agreement between South and Southeast Asia.



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