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ASEAN–India Maritime Cooperation: From Infrastructure Expansion to Corridor Performance

Ruth Banomyong

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ASEAN–India Maritime Cooperation: From Infrastructure Expansion to Corridor Performance

Ruth Banomyong*

Abstract: Maritime transport remains the backbone of ASEAN–India trade and regional integration, supported by frameworks such as India's Act East Policy, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, and BIMSTEC. This chapter examines the transition from connectivity expansion to maritime corridor performance, arguing that infrastructure alone does not deliver economic integration or resilience. Drawing on the UNCTAD Liner Shipping Bilateral Connectivity Index for 2020–2025, it shows that connectivity has strengthened across most ASEAN member states, led by Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam, while revealing three tiers of connectivity across the region. The chapter introduces "connectivity competence"—resting on performance transparency, functional interoperability, and maritime–hinterland integration—to convert connectivity into capability. It proposes an ASEAN–India Maritime Corridor Initiative (AIMCI) with five practical components to enhance monitoring, interoperability, supply chain resilience, and maritime security cooperation.

1. Introduction

Maritime connectivity has become increasingly important for economic integration and regional stability in the Indo-Pacific (Niazi, 2024). Maritime transport remains the backbone of international trade and economic integration. In the case of ASEAN and India, maritime connectivity plays a critical role in facilitating trade, investment, supply chain integration, and broader cooperation across the Indo-Pacific

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(ASEAN–India Centre [AIC] & Research and Information System for Developing Countries [RIS], 2021).

ASEAN and India are connected by a shared maritime geography centred on the Bay of Bengal and the wider Indo-Pacific. This maritime space supports growing trade, investment, and connectivity between the two regions. As a result, maritime cooperation has become an increasingly important pillar of ASEAN–India relations, supported by initiatives such as the Act East Policy, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) (Bhogal, 2018; Rao, 2019).

This paper examines the transition from connectivity expansion to maritime corridor performance in ASEAN–India cooperation. Although considerable progress has been made in improving maritime connectivity, infrastructure alone does not guarantee economic integration, resilience, or efficiency. The paper argues that future cooperation should focus on enhancing the performance of maritime corridors and the capabilities required to support them.

ASEAN–India relations have deepened considerably over the past three decades. Alongside growing trade and investment ties, maritime cooperation has emerged as an important area of collaboration, particularly in relation to connectivity, supply chains, and regional development (AIC & RIS, 2021). The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) provide complementary frameworks for supporting this cooperation.

Existing literature and policy initiatives generally view connectivity as a driver of economic integration. As a result, considerable attention has been devoted to developing transport infrastructure, ports, shipping services, and regional corridors connecting India and ASEAN (Negara, 2012; Bhogal, 2018). Initiatives such as BIMSTEC, the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway, and the Mekong–India Economic Corridor illustrate this emphasis on connectivity expansion.

However, connectivity should not be viewed as an end in itself. Recent disruptions, including the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions, and the Red Sea crisis, have shown that physical infrastructure alone cannot guarantee efficient and resilient supply chains. The challenge is no longer simply to create connectivity, but to ensure that it performs effectively. Consequently, future regional integration will depend increasingly on resilience, interoperability, digitalisation, and logistics performance rather than infrastructure expansion alone (Banomyong, 2025).

The challenge facing ASEAN–India maritime cooperation is no longer simply one of connectivity expansion. The more important question is whether existing connectivity can deliver reliable, resilient, and efficient outcomes. Achieving this requires a greater focus on the operational capabilities that underpin maritime corridor performance.

This paper therefore introduces the concept of connectivity competence. Connectivity competence refers to the institutional and operational capabilities required to transform connectivity into effective corridor performance. It is built upon three pillars: performance transparency, functional interoperability, and maritime–hinterland integration. The concept shifts attention from the provision of infrastructure towards the capabilities needed to ensure that connectivity systems operate efficiently, reliably, and resiliently. In short, infrastructure creates connectivity, while competence creates performance.

The paper first reviews the evolution of ASEAN–India maritime relations and assesses recent trends in maritime connectivity. It then examines how maritime corridors contribute to economic integration before introducing connectivity competence as a framework for improving corridor performance. Finally, it proposes an ASEAN–India Maritime Corridor Initiative (AIMCI) to support more effective and resilient maritime cooperation.

2. ASEAN–India Maritime Relations: From Strategic Partnership to Maritime Cooperation

The development of ASEAN–India maritime relations reflects the broader deepening of ties between South and Southeast Asia. Maritime cooperation has evolved from a supporting element of economic engagement into an important area of strategic collaboration. Although ASEAN and India have established a range of frameworks to support cooperation, future progress will depend on their ability to translate these commitments into tangible outcomes.

2.1 Historical Evolution of ASEAN–India Maritime Relations

The Look East Policy, introduced in the early 1990s, marked a significant shift in India's engagement with Southeast Asia. ASEAN was identified as a key partner for strengthening economic cooperation and expanding India's links with the wider Asian region. The policy laid the foundation for the deeper ASEAN–India relationship that developed over the following decades (Bhogal, 2018).

The introduction of the Act East Policy in 2014 marked a broadening of India's engagement with ASEAN. Beyond economic cooperation, the policy emphasised connectivity, maritime cooperation, and strategic engagement, reflecting the growing importance of the Indo-Pacific in regional affairs (Rao, 2019).

The elevation of ASEAN–India relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2022 reflected the growing importance of cooperation beyond trade and investment. Connectivity, maritime cooperation, supply chain resilience, and economic integration have become increasingly important areas of engagement. The partnership provides an institutional foundation for advancing these priorities (AIC-RIS, 2021).

2.2 Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Context

The emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a strategic construct has further strengthened the maritime dimension of ASEAN–India relations. Both ASEAN and India recognise that the Indian and Pacific Oceans are increasingly interconnected through trade, investment, logistics networks, and security challenges. Consequently, maritime cooperation has become an important component of regional stability and economic development (AIC-RIS, 2021; Niazi, 2024).

ASEAN's response to evolving regional dynamics is articulated through the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which emphasises inclusivity, dialogue, cooperation, connectivity, sustainable development, and ASEAN centrality (ASEAN, 2019). Rather than promoting exclusive geopolitical alignments, the AOIP seeks to strengthen practical cooperation in areas such as maritime cooperation, connectivity, sustainable development, and economic integration. The AOIP therefore provides an important framework through which ASEAN–India maritime cooperation can be advanced (ASEAN, 2019; RIS, 2026).

India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), launched in 2019, complements many of the objectives contained within the AOIP (Government of India, 2019). The IPOI focuses on maritime security, maritime ecology, maritime resources, disaster risk reduction, science and technology cooperation, trade connectivity, and capacity building. Recent efforts to align the AOIP and IPOI demonstrate growing recognition that ASEAN and India share common interests in promoting maritime stability, connectivity, and sustainable development throughout the Indo-Pacific region (RIS, 2026). More importantly, the AOIP–IPOI dialogue has increasingly shifted attention from strategic declarations towards practical cooperation and implementation.

At the subregional level, BIMSTEC occupies an important position within ASEAN–India maritime cooperation. Situated at the intersection of South and Southeast Asia, BIMSTEC provides a platform for strengthening economic integration and connectivity across the Bay of

Bengal. Transport connectivity, logistics facilitation, maritime transport, and multimodal corridor development have become central priorities within the BIMSTEC agenda (Yhome, 2017). However, despite strong political support, implementation challenges continue to constrain progress, highlighting the need for stronger institutional coordination and operational capabilities (Yhome, 2017).

2.3 Maritime Security Cooperation

Maritime security has emerged as another important pillar of ASEAN–India cooperation. Shared concerns regarding maritime safety, piracy, illegal fishing, transnational crime, humanitarian emergencies, and the protection of sea lines of communication have encouraged greater collaboration between ASEAN member states and India (AIC & RIS, 2021; Niazi, 2024).

Cooperation has expanded in areas such as maritime domain awareness, information sharing, naval diplomacy, coast guard engagement, and capacity building (Government of India, 2019; Niazi, 2024). Joint exercises, training programmes, and dialogue mechanisms have contributed to enhanced confidence-building and improved interoperability among maritime agencies. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) cooperation has become particularly important given the vulnerability of the Indo-Pacific region to natural disasters, climate-related events, and humanitarian crises. The experience of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, together with subsequent disaster response operations, has reinforced the importance of coordinated maritime response capabilities across the region (ASEAN, 2019; Government of India, 2019).

Maritime security cooperation has expanded considerably; it remains characterised by varying levels of institutional development and operational capacity across participating countries. As a result, maritime security cooperation often remains project-based rather than system-based, limiting its contribution to broader maritime corridor resilience (RIS, 2026; Niazi, 2024).

2.4 From Institutional Foundations to Operationalisation

The evolution of ASEAN–India maritime relations demonstrates that the institutional foundations for maritime cooperation are already firmly established. Through the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), BIMSTEC, and various bilateral and multilateral mechanisms, ASEAN and India possess a broad framework capable of supporting deeper maritime engagement (AIC & RIS, 2021; ASEAN, 2019; Government of India, 2019).

However, the existence of institutional frameworks does not automatically translate into effective maritime cooperation. Despite substantial progress in establishing political commitments and strategic partnerships, implementation remains uneven and fragmented (RIS, 2026; Yhome, 2017). The challenge facing ASEAN–India maritime cooperation is therefore no longer the creation of additional frameworks, but rather the operationalisation of existing commitments. Future cooperation must focus on translating strategic intentions into practical outcomes that improve maritime connectivity, enhance corridor performance, strengthen interoperability, and support resilient regional supply chains.

This challenge provides the rationale for examining the current state of maritime linkages between ASEAN and India, which forms the focus of the next section.

3. Maritime Linkages between ASEAN and India

The maritime relationship between ASEAN and India is fundamentally underpinned by shipping connectivity. Maritime transport remains the dominant mode of trade between the two regions, carrying the majority of merchandise trade and supporting participation in regional and global production networks. As ASEAN and India have become increasingly integrated into global supply chains, maritime connectivity has emerged as an important determinant of trade competitiveness, market accessibility, and economic resilience (UNCTAD, 2024).

This section assesses maritime linkages between ASEAN and India using the Liner Shipping Bilateral Connectivity Index (LSBCI) developed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The LSBCI measures the strength of maritime connectivity between pairs of countries by capturing the ease with which containers can move through the global liner shipping network. The index incorporates factors such as transshipment requirements, direct shipping connections, service competition, and vessel deployment. Higher LSBCI values indicate stronger maritime connectivity and greater accessibility between two countries (UNCTAD, 2025).

The LSBCI is particularly suitable for this analysis because it measures bilateral maritime connectivity rather than a country's overall integration into global shipping networks. Unlike the Liner Shipping Connectivity Index (LSCI), which assesses national connectivity, the LSBCI directly captures the strength of shipping linkages between India and individual ASEAN member states. The analysis therefore provides insights into how maritime connectivity has evolved between 2020 and 2025 and highlights the extent to which connectivity remains uneven across the region.

3.1 Maritime Connectivity Trends between ASEAN and India

Table 1 presents India's bilateral liner shipping connectivity with selected ASEAN member states between 2020 and 2025. The LSBCI ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating stronger maritime connectivity between two countries. Higher scores generally reflect more direct shipping services, fewer transshipments, and stronger integration within global liner shipping networks (UNCTAD, 2025). As a result, countries with higher LSBCI scores tend to enjoy better maritime accessibility and more efficient shipping connections.

Although the LSBCI does not have explicit threshold values, scores above 0.60 generally indicate relatively strong bilateral maritime connectivity, reflecting extensive shipping services and integration into

Table 1. India's Bilateral Liner Shipping Connectivity with ASEAN Member States (LSBCI), 2020–2025

Country	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Singapore	0.58	0.60	0.60	0.61	0.64	0.72
Malaysia	0.57	0.58	0.59	0.60	0.62	0.70
Vietnam	0.49	0.50	0.51	0.53	0.56	0.66
Thailand	0.49	0.50	0.50	0.51	0.54	0.56
Indonesia	0.40	0.32	0.32	0.50	0.43	0.44
Philippines	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.38	0.39	0.40
Myanmar	0.24	0.23	0.22	0.23	0.24	0.30
Cambodia	0.22	0.23	0.22	0.23	0.24	0.25
Brunei Darussalam	0.21	0.20	0.21	0.21	0.22	0.20

Source: Author's compilation based on United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) UNCTAD Stat database, Liner Shipping Bilateral Connectivity Index (LSBCI), 2025.

major liner shipping networks. Scores between 0.40 and 0.60 suggest moderate connectivity, while scores below 0.30 indicate relatively weak maritime linkages characterised by fewer direct connections and greater dependence on transshipment services. The index should therefore be interpreted comparatively rather than as an absolute measure of performance.

The data in Table 1 reveal a general strengthening of maritime connectivity between India and ASEAN over the period under review. With the exception of Brunei Darussalam, all ASEAN member states recorded improvements in bilateral connectivity with India between 2020 and 2025. This trend suggests that maritime integration between India and ASEAN has continued to deepen despite disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and broader geopolitical uncertainties.

The results suggest the existence of three tiers of ASEAN–India maritime connectivity: a highly connected tier comprising Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam; an intermediate tier comprising Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines; and a lower-connectivity tier consisting of Myanmar, Cambodia, and Brunei Darussalam.

3.1.1 Strongest Maritime Linkages

The strongest maritime linkages are observed between India and Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam. In 2025, Singapore recorded the highest LSBCI score (0.72), closely followed by Malaysia (0.70) and Vietnam (0.66). These findings reflect the central role of Southeast Asia's major maritime hubs within regional and global liner shipping networks.

Singapore's position is unsurprising given its role as the leading transshipment hub in Asia and a key gateway linking the Indian Ocean with East Asian and global shipping routes. Similarly, Malaysia's strong connectivity reflects the importance of Port Klang and Tanjung Pelepas as major transshipment and gateway ports serving both regional and long-haul shipping services. Together, Singapore and Malaysia illustrate the continued importance of hub-and-spoke shipping networks in shaping ASEAN–India maritime connectivity. A significant proportion of maritime trade between India and ASEAN continues to rely on these established regional gateways.

The emergence of Vietnam as India's third most connected ASEAN maritime partner is particularly noteworthy. Between 2020 and 2025, Vietnam recorded the largest increase in connectivity among ASEAN member states, rising from 0.49 to 0.66. This development reflects broader shifts in regional production networks and supply chain geography. As multinational firms diversify manufacturing activities beyond China, Vietnam has become an increasingly important production and export platform, generating stronger trade and shipping linkages with India. The growth in connectivity also reflects the increasing economic significance of the Mekong region and the expanding role of Vietnam within regional value chains.

More broadly, the findings suggest that ASEAN–India maritime connectivity is increasingly shaped by two complementary dynamics. The first is the continued dominance of established maritime hubs such as Singapore and Malaysia. The second is the growing importance of emerging manufacturing and supply chain centres such as Vietnam. This indicates that future ASEAN–India maritime cooperation will depend not only on traditional gateway ports but also on the ability to integrate new production centres into regional maritime and logistics networks.

3.1.2 Emerging Maritime Linkages

Thailand and Indonesia represent a second tier of ASEAN–India maritime connectivity. Thailand's connectivity improved from 0.49 in 2020 to 0.56 in 2025, while Indonesia recorded a more modest increase from 0.40 to 0.44 over the same period. Although both countries maintain important economic and strategic relationships with India, their maritime connectivity remains below that of Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

Thailand's position is particularly noteworthy given its central role in several regional connectivity initiatives, including BIMSTEC, the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway, and broader Mekong cooperation frameworks. Thailand also occupies a strategic geographic position linking mainland Southeast Asia with the Indian Ocean through both maritime and land-based transport networks. Despite these advantages, the growth in maritime connectivity between India and Thailand has been relatively modest compared with Viet Nam. This suggests that strong political relationships and participation in regional connectivity initiatives do not automatically translate into stronger maritime transport linkages. It also highlights the continuing dominance of established maritime hubs and shipping networks in shaping regional connectivity patterns.

The relatively slower growth in India–Thailand connectivity may also reflect the fact that many ASEAN–India maritime flows continue to be routed through major transshipment hubs such as Singapore and Malaysia rather than through direct shipping services. Consequently,

Thailand's strategic importance within regional connectivity frameworks is not yet fully reflected in bilateral maritime connectivity indicators. This observation reinforces the distinction between connectivity initiatives and connectivity outcomes that underpins the broader argument of this chapter.

Indonesia's relatively moderate performance is equally noteworthy. As the largest economy in ASEAN and the world's largest archipelagic state, Indonesia occupies a strategic position along some of the most important maritime routes connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Yet maritime connectivity between India and Indonesia remains only moderate when compared with Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam. One explanation may be the geographic dispersion of Indonesia's economic activities across a vast archipelago, which can dilute the concentration of shipping services observed in major regional hub economies. Another explanation is that India–Indonesia maritime trade remains less integrated into regional manufacturing and supply chain networks than the rapidly expanding India–Viet Nam relationship.

At the same time, Indonesia represents one of the most significant opportunities for future ASEAN–India maritime cooperation. The strategic location of the Andaman Sea, the Malacca Strait, and the eastern Indian Ocean creates natural opportunities for strengthening maritime linkages between the two countries. Enhanced cooperation in port development, maritime logistics, coastal shipping, and supply chain integration could contribute to stronger connectivity and support the emergence of new maritime corridors linking South and Southeast Asia.

Taken together, the experiences of Thailand and Indonesia suggest that geographic proximity and political cooperation alone are insufficient to generate strong maritime connectivity. The effectiveness of maritime linkages depends on the extent to which shipping networks, logistics systems, production networks, and trade flows become integrated. This finding further reinforces the need to move beyond connectivity expansion towards a broader focus on maritime corridor development and performance.

3.1.3 Weak Maritime Linkages

The weakest maritime linkages are observed between India and Myanmar, Cambodia, and Brunei Darussalam. Although Myanmar's connectivity improved from 0.24 in 2020 to 0.30 in 2025, overall connectivity remains comparatively low. Cambodia and Brunei Darussalam similarly maintain relatively weak maritime connections with India, recording LSBCI scores of 0.25 and 0.20 respectively in 2025.

These findings are significant because they highlight the uneven nature of ASEAN–India maritime integration. While some countries benefit from extensive shipping services and strong connections to global liner shipping networks, others remain relatively peripheral to regional maritime flows. The existence of such disparities raises important questions regarding the extent to which regional connectivity initiatives generate broad-based benefits across ASEAN.

Myanmar presents a particularly interesting case. Despite occupying a strategic geographic position between South and Southeast Asia and serving as a key component of India's Act East Policy, BIMSTEC, and the India–Myanmar–Thailand connectivity framework, maritime connectivity with India remains relatively weak. Political instability, infrastructure constraints, limited port development, and wider economic challenges have constrained the development of maritime transport linkages. The findings suggest that geographic proximity and strategic importance alone are insufficient to generate strong maritime connectivity when institutional and operational constraints remain unresolved.

Cambodia's relatively low connectivity can partly be explained by its limited role within regional maritime shipping networks. Much of Cambodia's international trade continues to rely on regional gateway ports and transshipment services, particularly through neighbouring countries. As a result, direct maritime connectivity with India remains relatively underdeveloped despite growing economic relations between the two countries.

Brunei Darussalam's low connectivity reflects the structure and scale of its economy. As a small, resource-based economy with relatively limited containerised trade volumes, Brunei naturally attracts fewer liner shipping services than larger ASEAN economies. Consequently, maritime trade between India and Brunei remains dependent on indirect shipping connections and regional transshipment hubs.

Taken together, the experiences of Myanmar, Cambodia, and Brunei illustrate that maritime connectivity is not distributed evenly across ASEAN. The benefits of regional shipping networks tend to concentrate around major hubs, gateway ports, and manufacturing centres, while smaller or less integrated economies remain dependent on indirect connections. This pattern reinforces the hub-centric nature of ASEAN–India maritime connectivity and suggests that improvements in regional connectivity do not automatically translate into more balanced integration across all ASEAN member states.

More importantly, the findings highlight a broader policy challenge. Expanding maritime connectivity at the regional level does not necessarily ensure that all countries benefit equally from that connectivity. Future ASEAN–India cooperation must therefore consider not only how to strengthen overall connectivity, but also how to improve access, integration, and participation for countries that remain relatively peripheral to regional maritime networks.

3.2 Connectivity Expansion and Its Limitations

The LSBCI evidence demonstrates that maritime connectivity between ASEAN and India has improved between 2020 and 2025. However, the findings reveal that connectivity remains both uneven and highly concentrated. The strongest linkages are associated with major maritime hubs and manufacturing centres, while several ASEAN member states continue to maintain relatively weak shipping connections with India. This suggests that maritime connectivity is shaped not only by geography or political cooperation, but also by the concentration of trade, logistics capabilities, and shipping services.

The findings also indicate that stronger connectivity does not necessarily imply deeper economic integration. While Singapore, Malaysia, and Viet Nam benefit from increasingly dense shipping networks, connectivity alone does not guarantee efficient logistics systems, seamless border procedures, or resilient supply chains. Maritime connectivity should therefore be viewed as a necessary but insufficient condition for broader economic integration.

More importantly, the results highlight the distinction between connectivity and performance. The existence of shipping connections does not reveal how effectively maritime corridors function or how efficiently goods move between origins and destinations. Understanding this distinction requires a broader corridor perspective that considers institutions, logistics systems, and governance arrangements alongside physical connectivity. This forms the focus of the next section.

4. Maritime Corridors: From Connectivity to Economic Integration

The analysis of maritime linkages in the previous section demonstrates that connectivity between India and ASEAN has strengthened over time. However, stronger maritime connectivity alone does not necessarily translate into greater economic integration, improved supply chain performance, or broader developmental outcomes. While connectivity may facilitate the movement of goods between locations, the extent to which these flows generate economic value depends on the existence of supporting institutions, logistics systems, governance mechanisms, and productive economic activities. Consequently, connectivity should be viewed not as an end in itself but as a means of facilitating broader economic integration.

This distinction is particularly important in the context of ASEAN–India maritime cooperation. Much of the policy discourse surrounding regional connectivity has focused on infrastructure development, transport links, and the expansion of shipping services. While these

initiatives are necessary, they are insufficient to generate sustainable economic benefits unless they are embedded within broader corridor development strategies. The challenge therefore lies in transforming connectivity into economic integration through the development of effective maritime corridors.

4.1 From Transport Corridors to Economic Corridors

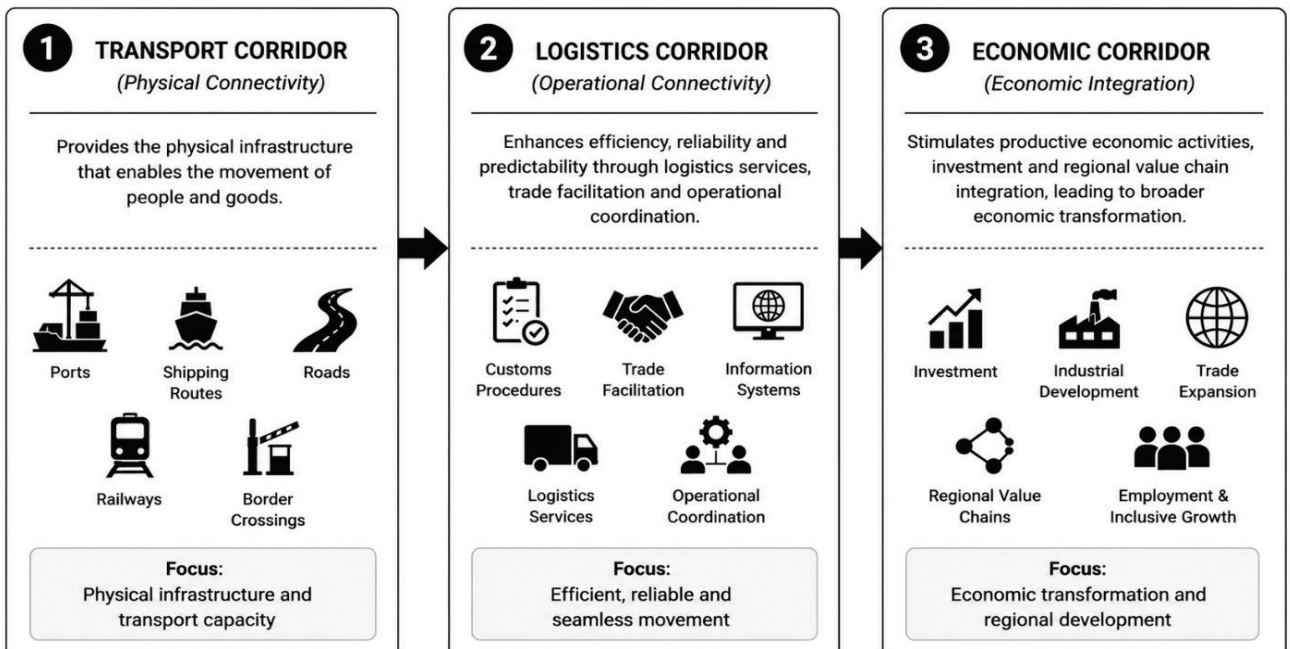
The relationship between connectivity and economic integration can be understood through a corridor development framework that distinguishes between transport corridors, logistics corridors, and economic corridors (Banomyong, 2012). As illustrated in Figure 1, corridor development involves a progression from physical connectivity to operational connectivity and ultimately to economic integration.

A transport corridor provides the physical infrastructure required for the movement of goods and people. A logistics corridor extends this foundation through trade facilitation, logistics services, customs procedures, and operational coordination that improve the efficiency and reliability of supply chains. An economic corridor emerges when improved connectivity and logistics performance stimulate investment, industrial development, and regional value chain integration.

The distinction is important because infrastructure alone does not guarantee economic outcomes. Many connectivity initiatives succeed in creating transport corridors but fail to develop the logistics systems and institutional arrangements necessary to generate broader economic benefits. This challenge is particularly relevant to ASEAN–India maritime cooperation, where stronger connectivity must be complemented by improvements in corridor performance if deeper economic integration is to be achieved.

This corridor framework suggests that maritime connectivity should be assessed not only in terms of transport links but also in terms of its contribution to logistics efficiency and economic integration. From this perspective, the key question is whether ASEAN–India maritime

Figure 1. From Transport Corridors to Economic Corridors



Source: Adapted from Banomyong (2012)

cooperation is creating corridors that facilitate broader economic activity rather than simply improving physical connectivity. The following section examines several emerging maritime corridors to assess their potential contribution to regional integration.

4.2 Maritime Corridors as Instruments of Regional Integration

Maritime corridors can be viewed as specialised economic corridors in which ports and shipping networks serve as the principal links between production centres, logistics hubs, and markets (Banomyong, 2012; Banomyong, 2026). Their effectiveness depends not only on maritime transport infrastructure but also on the integration of shipping services, logistics systems, hinterland connections, and trade facilitation mechanisms.

For ASEAN and India, maritime corridors provide a mechanism for translating connectivity into economic outcomes. The challenge is therefore not simply to strengthen maritime links, but to ensure that these links support efficient logistics systems, resilient supply chains, and broader economic integration.

4.2.1 Bay of Bengal Maritime Corridor

The Bay of Bengal occupies a central position within ASEAN–India maritime relations. Situated between South and Southeast Asia, it serves as a critical interface connecting India with Myanmar, Thailand, and the wider ASEAN region. Historically, the Bay of Bengal has facilitated trade and economic interaction, while more recently it has become an important focus of India's Act East Policy and BIMSTEC cooperation (Rao, 2019; Yhome, 2017).

The Bay of Bengal Maritime Corridor possesses significant potential to support regional integration by linking ports, logistics hubs, industrial zones, and emerging supply chains. However, despite its strategic location and growing policy attention, the corridor remains characterised by uneven infrastructure development, varying regulatory

regimes, and fragmented governance arrangements (Yhome, 2017). While physical connectivity has improved, the corridor has yet to realise its full economic potential due to persistent operational and institutional constraints.

The Bay of Bengal Maritime Corridor therefore illustrates the distinction between connectivity and corridor performance. The principal challenge is no longer the creation of connectivity, but the ability to coordinate infrastructure, logistics systems, and institutional arrangements across multiple countries. The case suggests that stronger maritime connectivity alone is unlikely to generate deeper economic integration unless accompanied by improvements in corridor governance and operational performance (Banomyong, 2012).

4.2.2 The India–Myanmar–Thailand–Mekong Interface

A second corridor of strategic importance is the India–Myanmar–Thailand–Mekong Interface, which links the Bay of Bengal with the economic centres of mainland Southeast Asia. The corridor occupies a strategic position connecting maritime networks in the Indian Ocean with the rapidly developing economies of the Mekong subregion.

The significance of this interface extends beyond transport connectivity. Dang et al. (2022) Mekong–India Economic Corridor (MIEC) was conceived to support such outcomes by integrating transport infrastructure, logistics services, industrial development, and investment promotion (Banomyong, 2012).

However, progress has been slower than anticipated. While transport infrastructure and physical connectivity have improved, institutional coordination, logistics integration, and regulatory harmonisation continue to lag behind. As a result, the corridor has yet to generate the level of economic transformation originally envisaged. The case illustrates a broader lesson for ASEAN–India maritime cooperation: infrastructure development alone is insufficient to create an effective economic corridor. Corridor performance ultimately depends on the ability to align logistics

systems, institutions, and governance arrangements across multiple countries (Banomyong, 2012).

4.3 Connectivity Alone Is Not Enough

The corridor cases highlight a common lesson: connectivity is a necessary condition for economic integration, but it is not a sufficient one. Infrastructure and shipping services can facilitate movement, yet corridor performance ultimately depends on effective institutions, efficient logistics systems, and appropriate governance arrangements (Banomyong, 2026). The experience of ASEAN–India connectivity initiatives therefore suggests that the challenge is no longer simply to create connectivity, but to ensure that connectivity delivers economic outcomes. This raises a broader question concerning the capabilities required to transform connectivity into performance, which forms the focus of the next section.

Connectivity is a necessary condition for economic integration, but it is not a sufficient one. Infrastructure and shipping services may enable movement, yet the ability of corridors to generate economic value depends on a wider set of institutional, operational, and governance factors.

5. Connectivity Competence: Operationalising ASEAN–India Maritime Cooperation

The analysis presented in the previous sections suggests that connectivity alone does not guarantee economic integration, logistics efficiency, or supply chain resilience. Although maritime connectivity between India and ASEAN has improved, significant differences remain in corridor performance and operational effectiveness. Well-connected countries and ports may still experience congestion, delays, fragmented logistics systems, and vulnerability to external disruptions. These observations suggest that connectivity should be viewed as a necessary but insufficient condition for successful maritime cooperation. The critical issue is not simply the existence of connectivity, but the capability of connectivity systems to function effectively in practice.

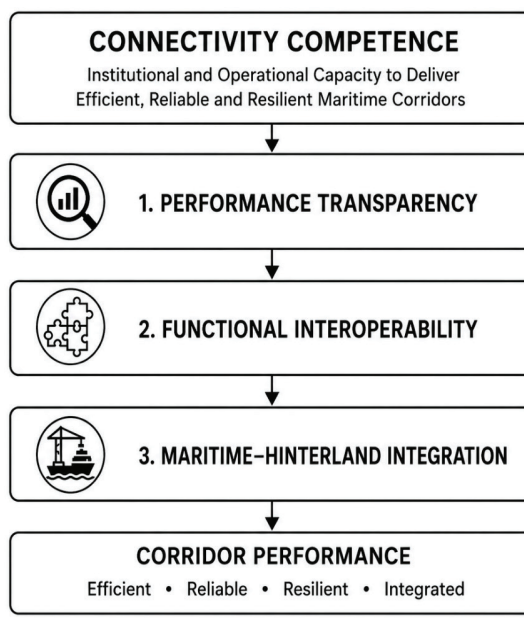
This chapter argues that the answer lies in connectivity competence. Connectivity creates opportunities for interaction, whereas connectivity competence determines whether those opportunities can be converted into reliable, efficient, and resilient outcomes. Future progress in ASEAN–India maritime cooperation therefore depends not only on expanding connectivity, but also on improving the capability of connectivity systems to perform effectively.

5.1 Defining Connectivity Competence

This section introduces the concept of connectivity competence, defined as the institutional and operational capacity required to ensure that connectivity systems function efficiently, reliably, and resiliently in support of economic and strategic objectives.

Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework of connectivity competence developed in this chapter. The framework argues that the

Figure 2: Connectivity Competence Framework



effectiveness of maritime connectivity depends not only on the existence of infrastructure and transport links, but also on the institutional and operational capabilities that enable connectivity systems to function effectively. Connectivity competence is therefore conceptualised as comprising three interrelated pillars: performance transparency, functional interoperability, and maritime–hinterland integration. Together, these pillars contribute to improved corridor performance by enhancing the efficiency, reliability, resilience, and integration of maritime transport and logistics systems.

These three pillars were selected because they address the principal limitations identified in the preceding analysis. Performance transparency addresses the need to measure and monitor connectivity outcomes. Functional interoperability addresses the fragmentation of procedures and systems that constrain corridor efficiency. Maritime–hinterland integration addresses the challenge of translating maritime connectivity into broader economic integration. Together, these dimensions provide a practical framework for improving maritime corridor performance.

5.1.1 Pillar One: Performance Transparency

Performance transparency refers to the ability to measure and monitor maritime connectivity and corridor performance. Indicators such as the LSCI, LSBCI, PLSCI, and CPPI enable policymakers to identify bottlenecks, benchmark performance, and support evidence-based decision-making. Transparency encourages a shift in focus from infrastructure provision towards performance outcomes.

The LSBCI analysis demonstrated that maritime connectivity across ASEAN and India is uneven. Measuring such differences is a prerequisite for identifying connectivity gaps and prioritising interventions. Performance transparency enables corridor managers and policymakers to identify bottlenecks, benchmark outcomes, and prioritise interventions. Without measurement, connectivity performance cannot be effectively managed or improved.

5.1.2 Pillar Two: Functional Interoperability

Functional interoperability refers to the ability of institutions, systems, and processes to operate seamlessly across organisational and national boundaries. Customs procedures, Port Community Systems, National Single Windows, and digital trade platforms play a critical role in reducing transaction costs and facilitating the efficient movement of goods and information. As maritime logistics becomes increasingly digitalised, interoperability becomes a key determinant of corridor performance. The Bay of Bengal and Mekong corridor cases illustrate that infrastructure investments alone do not guarantee efficient flows when procedures and systems remain fragmented.

5.1.3 Pillar Three: Maritime–Hinterland Integration

Maritime–hinterland integration refers to the extent to which ports are connected with inland logistics systems, production networks, and economic activities. Effective integration requires coordination among ports, dry ports, logistics centres, industrial zones, and transport corridors. Guerrero et al. (2026).

The corridor framework presented in Section 4 suggests that economic benefits emerge only when maritime gateways are effectively connected with inland logistics and production systems.

5.2 Infrastructure Creates Connectivity, Competence Creates Performance

The three pillars of connectivity competence highlight that connectivity alone is insufficient to achieve the objectives of ASEAN–India maritime cooperation. While ports, shipping services, and transport corridors create opportunities for interaction, the benefits of connectivity depend on the ability of institutions, systems, and stakeholders to operate effectively. Performance transparency, functional interoperability, and maritime–hinterland integration therefore represent the core capabilities required to transform connectivity into efficient, reliable, and resilient corridor performance.

The distinction is straightforward: infrastructure creates connectivity, whereas competence creates performance. For ASEAN–India maritime cooperation, the challenge is no longer whether connectivity exists, but whether it can consistently deliver economic and strategic outcomes. Addressing this challenge requires moving beyond conceptual frameworks towards practical implementation. The next section therefore proposes an ASEAN–India Maritime Corridor Initiative (AIMCI) designed to operationalise connectivity competence through targeted monitoring, interoperability, integration, and resilience measures.

6. Towards an ASEAN–India Maritime Corridor Initiative

The preceding analysis suggests that the next phase of ASEAN–India maritime cooperation should focus on improving corridor performance rather than expanding connectivity alone. While maritime connectivity has strengthened over the past decade, significant gaps remain in transparency, interoperability, resilience, and maritime–hinterland integration.

To address these challenges, this chapter proposes an ASEAN–India Maritime Corridor Initiative (AIMCI). Rather than creating new institutions, the AIMCI would build upon existing ASEAN–India, AOIP, IPOI, and BIMSTEC mechanisms to strengthen the operational capabilities required for high-performing maritime corridors.

As shown in Table 2, the AIMCI translates the three pillars of connectivity competence into a set of practical initiatives designed to improve corridor performance and support more resilient and integrated maritime cooperation.

6.1 Component 1: Maritime Connectivity Monitoring System

Objective: Establish a common evidence base for monitoring ASEAN–India maritime connectivity.

Table 2. Aligning Connectivity Competence with the ASEAN–India Maritime Corridor Initiative (AIMCI)

Connectivity Competence Pillar	AIMCI Initiative	Expected Outcome
Performance Transparency	Maritime Connectivity Monitoring System	Improved monitoring of maritime connectivity and corridor performance
Performance Transparency	Maritime Corridor Performance Dashboard	Evidence-based policymaking and benchmarking of corridor performance
Functional Interoperability	Port and Logistics Interoperability Programme	Improved coordination among customs, ports, logistics providers, and digital platforms
Maritime–Hinterland Integration	Critical Minerals and Energy Corridor Platform	Stronger integration of maritime corridors with strategic supply chains and inland economic activities
Cross-Cutting Support	Maritime Security and Resilience Cooperation	Enhanced corridor resilience, security, and continuity of maritime trade flows

Source: Author's own

Key Actions

- Develop an annual ASEAN–India Maritime Connectivity Report.
- Monitor maritime connectivity using indicators such as the LSCI, LSBCI, and PLSCI.
- Identify emerging connectivity gaps, underserved routes, and opportunities for network expansion.
- Benchmark maritime connectivity performance across ASEAN member states and India.

Expected Outcome

Improved transparency and evidence-based decision-making regarding maritime connectivity trends and priorities.

6.2 Component 2: Maritime Corridor Performance Dashboard

Objective: Measure whether improvements in connectivity are translating into better corridor performance.

Key Actions

- Develop a common set of corridor performance indicators.
- Monitor port efficiency, vessel turnaround times, cargo dwell times, corridor transit times, and customs clearance performance.
- Incorporate international benchmarks such as the Container Port Performance Index (CPPI).
- Publish regular corridor performance assessments.

Expected Outcome

A stronger focus on operational performance and improved accountability for corridor outcomes.

6.3 Component 3: Port and Logistics Interoperability Programme

Objective: Improve operational coordination across maritime and logistics systems.

Key Actions

- Promote interoperability among National Single Window systems.
- Encourage integration of Port Community Systems (PCS).
- Harmonise digital trade and transport documentation.
- Develop data-sharing protocols among customs authorities, ports, shipping lines, and logistics providers.
- Pilot digital trade corridors linking selected ASEAN and Indian ports.

Expected Outcome

Reduced transaction costs, fewer administrative delays, and more seamless cross-border logistics operations.

6.4 Component 4: Strategic Supply Chain Corridor Platform

Objective: Strengthen the resilience of strategic maritime supply chains linking ASEAN and India.

Key Actions

- Map critical mineral and energy supply chains dependent on maritime transport.
- Identify vulnerable maritime routes and logistics nodes.
- Conduct corridor risk assessments and resilience planning exercises.
- Promote information sharing among governments, ports, logistics providers, and industry stakeholders.
- Support coordination of strategic infrastructure investments.

Expected Outcome

More resilient and secure maritime supply chains supporting industrial development and energy transition objectives.

6.5 Component 5: Maritime Security and Resilience Cooperation

Objective: Enhance the security and resilience of ASEAN–India maritime corridors.

Key Actions

- Strengthen maritime domain awareness and information-sharing mechanisms.
- Expand cooperation among maritime enforcement agencies and coast guards.
- Conduct joint Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) exercises.
- Promote maritime cybersecurity cooperation.
- Develop contingency and disruption-response protocols for key maritime corridors.

Expected Outcome

Greater resilience and continuity of maritime transport operations during security incidents, natural disasters, and other disruptions.

6.6 From Connectivity Expansion to Connectivity Competence

Taken together, these five components provide a practical mechanism for operationalising connectivity competence. The AIMCI seeks to move ASEAN–India maritime cooperation from a primary focus on connectivity projects towards a stronger emphasis on corridor performance. Rather than creating new institutions, the initiative builds upon existing ASEAN–India, AOIP, IPOI, and BIMSTEC mechanisms while strengthening the capabilities required to support efficient, reliable, resilient, and integrated maritime corridors.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that ASEAN–India maritime cooperation is entering a new phase of development. While significant progress has been made in strengthening maritime connectivity and establishing institutional frameworks for cooperation, connectivity alone is insufficient to deliver resilient and efficient maritime corridors. The central challenge is no longer how to create additional connectivity, but how to improve the performance of existing and emerging connectivity systems. In order to

address this challenge, the chapter introduced the concept of connectivity competence, defined as the institutional and operational capacity required to ensure that connectivity systems function efficiently, reliably, and resiliently. Three pillars were identified as critical to improving corridor performance: performance transparency, functional interoperability, and maritime–hinterland integration. Together, these capabilities enable connectivity to generate broader economic and strategic outcomes.

Building upon this framework, the chapter proposed the ASEAN–India Maritime Corridor Initiative (AIMCI) as a practical mechanism for operationalising connectivity competence through enhanced monitoring, interoperability, integration, and resilience cooperation. The broader implication is that ASEAN–India maritime cooperation must move beyond a traditional focus on infrastructure development towards a stronger emphasis on corridor performance. As supply chains become more complex and the Indo-Pacific faces growing geopolitical, economic, and environmental uncertainties, the ability to manage connectivity effectively will become increasingly important. Infrastructure creates connectivity; competence creates performance. The future success of ASEAN–India maritime cooperation will therefore depend on its ability to transform connectivity into capability and capability into sustainable regional prosperity.

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