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ASEAN and India to Start Talks over Extension of India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Highway to Vietnam

The Trilateral Highway, linking Moreh in Manipur, India, to Mae-Sot in Thailand through Mandalay in Myanmar, was once visualized as a highway of opportunity and friendship that would facilitate not only the movement of goods and services, but also of people and ideas. There are now plans to expand the highway to provide more seamless connectivity between India and its Southeast Asian neighbors.

The Indian government is in talks with ASEAN countries over expanding the India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) highway. Stretching a total of 1,360 km, the IMT highway currently runs from Moreh in India to Mae-Sot in Thailand. India and the ASEAN nations are discussing plans to extend the highway to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Speaking at the ASEAN-India Connectivity Summit in New Delhi on 12 December 2017, Dakshita Das, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, announced that the relevant parties have already agreed on a line of credit for the purpose of certain projects in relation to the extension.

Another area in which the Indian government is working to connect India with South East Asia is the IMT Motor Vehicle Agreement (IMT MVA). In 2014, India, Myanmar and Thailand commenced negotiations on finalizing and implementing the IMT MVA. It is necessary to conclude the framework agreements urgently in order to utilize the physical road infrastructure of the IMT Trilateral Highway. Thailand also needs to forge close cooperation with other ASEAN member states in order to complete the vision of India-ASEAN connectivity.

The Indian government has estimated that once India and the ASEAN member countries connect, they will have tremendous potential in terms of incremental GDP. Connectivity can generate an estimated 70 billion dollars annually in incremental GDP as well as 20 million dollars incremental aggregate employment by 2025. Connecting India with the Southeast Asian countries through a road network will not only create jobs but also ensure that the local people along the highway will reap the benefits.

Thailand Removed from US Priority Watch List

A decade after being put on the Priority Watch List (PWL), Thailand has recently been removed from the list, announced the US Trade Representative (USTR) on 16 December 2017.

Deemed to have been one of the countries with poor IP protection, Thailand had been listed as an “Intellectual Property Violator” by the USTR for 10 years since 2007. However, due to Thailand’s substantially improving protection and enforcement of intellectual property (IP) rights, the USTR has now moved to close the Special 301 Out-of-Cycle Review of Thailand that was initiated on September 15, 2017, and removed Thailand from the Special 301 Priority Watch List, confirmed the statement issued by USTR Office. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the country still remains on the Watch List (WL).

It said that Thailand has been taking several proactive measures to address intellectual property (IP) infringements, including amending IP regulations to strengthen the legal framework against the violation of IPRs, increasing the number of inspectors for patents and copyrights to speed up the registration process, and streamlining



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regulations. Other measures include a commitment from Thailand to improve transparency related to pharmaceutical issues, such as taking stakeholder input into account and providing regular consultation opportunities with the Thai Food and Drug Administration.

In addition, the Thai government has also increased the budget for the Department of Intellectual Property Rights to procure equipment and information technology systems while ordering law-enforcement authorities—including the police, military, Department of Special Investigation, the Anti-Money Laundering Organisation and Customs Department—to help combat such violations.

The United States' decision to remove Thailand from the Priority Watch List of intellectual property (IP) violators will boost the country's international image and economy as well as the confidence of foreign investors, and therefore attract more foreign investment to the country.

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