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SASEC NEWS

THE SOUTH ASIA SUBREGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION NEWSLETTER

ISSUE #123

MAY 2026

WWW.SASEC.ASIA



Advancing Regional Cooperation through SASEC Meetings

The South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Program convened meetings to strengthen collaboration on priority regional initiatives. The [2025 Senior Officials Meeting](#) outlined next steps for deepening cooperation, while the [Energy Working Group](#) and the [Transport Working Group](#) advanced the SASEC Strategy 2035 for their respective operational priorities. The [Trade Facilitation Working Group](#) shared updates from the 13th Customs Subgroup, and the [Tourism Knowledge Workshop](#) reviewed the proposed SASEC Sustainable Regional Tourism Program Framework. A [knowledge session](#) discussed the draft Ecosystem and Value Chain Approach 2035 for food security, safety, and trade. The workshop on [Advancing Trusted Trader Programs in SASEC](#) explored pathways from AEO implementation to Mutual Recognition Arrangements. The [SASEC Customs Subgroup held an intersessional meeting](#) in March 2026, which discussed initiatives to improve trade facilitation, strengthen customs cooperation, and enhance coordinated border management. Together, these meetings reinforced SASEC's commitment to regional integration, resilience, and sustainable development.

Intersessional Meeting of the SASEC Subgroup on Customs 2026

24–26 March 2026: Manila, Philippines

The SASEC Customs Subgroup held its intersessional meeting chaired by Mr. Shyam Bhandari, Director General of Nepal's Department of Customs. Customs Officials from all SASEC member countries discussed initiatives to improve trade facilitation, strengthen customs cooperation, and enhance coordinated border management. The meeting also featured an experience sharing session with the Philippine Bureau of Customs at the Port of Clark on enforcing trade controls in freeport and special economic zones.

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SASEC Senior Officials Meeting 2025

8–9 December 2025: Kathmandu, Nepal

SASEC Senior Officials approved the SASEC Strategies 2035 for Transport, Trade Facilitation, and Energy, and the SASEC Customs Development Framework 2035. They also endorsed decisions from the respective Working Groups, and recognized tourism as an important pillar of economic corridor development and emphasized digital transformation as a cross-cutting driver across sectors anchored in core digital public infrastructure. Furthermore, they endorsed the Action Plan for SASEC Initiatives (2025–2027) and underscored the need to align the next APSI cycle (2026–2028) with the SASEC Strategy 2035 and Working Group priorities.

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Advancing Trusted Trader Programs in SASEC

8–10 December 2025: Bengaluru, India

The National Academy of Customs, Indirect Taxes and Narcotics of the Government of India, with support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), held the Advancing Trusted Trader Programs. The meeting discussed how to advance from Authorized Economic Operator Program implementation to Mutual Recognition Arrangements and promote collaboration for trade facilitation and security.

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SASEC Trade Facilitation Working Group Meeting

2–3 December 2025: Kathmandu, Nepal

The meeting focused on enhancing regional cooperation through various trade facilitation initiatives. The meeting presented knowledge works related to the highly facilitated trade corridor, comprehensive trade gateway ecosystem development, and ecosystem development for food trade, food safety and food security. The meeting also featured updates from the 13th SASEC Customs Subgroup, discussions on the SASEC Strategy 2035 for Trade Facilitation Operational Priority, and plans for updating the APSI 2025-2027.

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SASEC Knowledge Workshop on Ecosystem and Value Chain Approach for Food Security, Food Safety and Food Trade in SASEC Partner Countries

2–3 December 2025: Kathmandu, Nepal

The first knowledge workshop on food security, food safety, and food trade discussed various topics including the draft Ecosystem and Value Chain Approach 2035 for Food Security, Food Safety and Food Trade, food security in SASEC

partner countries, the food safety ecosystem, regional cooperation and integration in food trade, and the sanitary and phytosanitary and technical barriers to trade measures and issues.

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SASEC Transport Working Group Meeting

1–3 December 2025: Kathmandu, Nepal

The meeting focused on topics aimed at advancing regional cooperation in transport. It discussed the endorsement of the SASEC Strategy 2035 for Transport Operational Priority (SST 2035) and reviewed the APSI 2025-27, with plans for updating it for 2026-28. Additionally, participants presented knowledge works to support regional cooperation in the transport sector and engaged in discussions about future prospects.

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SASEC Energy Working Group Meeting

26–28 November 2025: Kathmandu, Nepal

The meeting discussed progress in energy cooperation and the various knowledge work and initiatives. The meeting also tackled the draft SASEC Strategy 2035 on Energy Operational Priority and reviewed and endorsed the APSI 2025-27. The meeting gave updates on the proposed SASEC Green Finance Facility, outlining its governance framework and alignment with the nationally determined contributions of SASEC countries. Strengthening the supply and value chain for electrical equipment was discussed, building on the regional workshop held in July 2025 in New Delhi, India.

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SASEC Tourism Knowledge Workshop

24–25 November 2025: Kathmandu, Nepal

The meeting discussed progress in regional cooperation in tourism and the various knowledge work and initiatives in the SASEC countries. The meeting presented case studies of successful integrated transborder development and discussed possible strategies that may be replicated in SASEC. The meeting also discussed the SASEC Sustainable Regional Tourism Program Framework, a proposed approach for developing tourism and regional tourism circuits as part of economic corridor development, developing cross-border tourism, and the development of a roadmap for tourism in SASEC partner countries.

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SASEC PROJECTS



- **India: Integrated Ecotourism and Sustainable Agri-Based Livelihood Development in Meghalaya Project**
- **Sri Lanka: Sustainable Tourism Sector Development Program (Subprogram 1)**

India: Integrated Ecotourism and Sustainable Agri-Based Livelihood Development in Meghalaya Project

22 December 2025

Meghalaya's potential for nature-based ecotourism is constrained by inadequate infrastructure and facilities, as well as unsustainable land management practices, which lead to land degradation. The project aims to promote economic

growth and climate resilience in the state by integrating nature-based ecotourism with sustainable land management, including forest management and natural farming.

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Sri Lanka: Sustainable Tourism Sector Development Program (Subprogram 1)

17 November 2025

The Sustainable Tourism Sector Development Program aims to support the Government of Sri Lanka in creating a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable tourism sector by boosting tourist arrivals and foreign exchange earnings from tourism and by leveraging private sector participation through strategic reforms and targeted catalytic investments. The program combines a policy-based loan with two subprograms and a project investment component.

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NEWS

Senior SASEC customs officials visited the Clark Freeport and Special Economic Zone

- **Sri Lanka President and India VP Emphasize Deepening Cooperation in Energy Security and Port Development**
- **SASEC Customs Subgroup Holds Field Visit to Clark Freeport Zone-Philippines**
- **Bhutan National Council Approves Bhutan-Thailand Free Trade Agreement**
- **Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to Develop a Joint Tourism Initiative**

Sri Lanka President and India VP Emphasize Deepening Cooperation in Energy Security and Port Development

20 April 2026: Colombo, Sri Lanka

India Vice President C. P. Radhakrishnan visited Sri Lanka on 19-20 April 2026, meeting President Anura Kumara Dissanayake. Both sides committed to deepening cooperation in economy, education, health, tourism, investment, and trade, with special emphasis on energy security and port development.

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Bangladesh, Nepal Look to Upgrade Syedpur Airport and Make Airfares More Affordable

29 March 2026: Dhaka, Bangladesh

Ms. Afroza Khanam, Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister of the Government of Bangladesh, and Mr. Ghanshyam Bhandari, Nepal Ambassador to Bangladesh, discussed deepening cooperation in aviation, tourism, and trade. They discussed their shared commitment to explore upgrading Bangladesh's Syedpur Airport and strategies to make airfares more affordable on the Dhaka (Bangladesh)-Kathmandu (Nepal) route.

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SASEC Customs Subgroup Holds Field Visit to Clark Freeport Zone-Philippines

26 March 2026: Pampanga, Philippines

The SASEC Subgroup on Customs held a field visit to the Clark Freeport and Special Economic Zone in the Philippines to study integrated customs operations and economic zone management. Senior customs officials from SASEC countries conducted the visit, hosted by the Philippines Bureau of Customs, Port of Clark, to examine operational practices in an active aviation area and special economic zone.

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Bhutan, Sri Lanka Explore Closer Cooperation in the Aviation Sector

24 March 2026: Colombo, Sri Lanka

The civil aviation authorities of Bhutan and Sri Lanka held a bilateral meeting to explore closer cooperation in the aviation sector. The Bhutanese delegation presented proposals to enhance international scheduled passenger operations between the two countries and discussed expanding aviation training opportunities in Sri Lanka for Bhutanese students. Sri Lanka requested Bhutan to submit a formal proposal toward establishing an Air Services Agreement between the two nations.

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Bangladesh-Bhutan 10th Commerce Secretary Level Meeting Furthers Tourism, Trade Facilitation, Private Sector Collaboration and FTA Discussions

10 March 2026: Dhaka, Bangladesh

The Governments of Bhutan and Bangladesh held their 10th Commerce Secretary Level Meeting. The agenda included cooperation under tourism, trade facilitation, and agriculture, as well as increasing private sector collaboration and consideration of the proposal to add products under the Preferential Trade Agreement 2020 to further enhance bilateral trade and explore the possibility of a Free Trade Agreement.

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Commentary: Advancing Corridor-Based Industrial Development in India

9 March 2026: Manila, Philippines

Transport corridors have evolved from trade routes into economic and industrial corridors that combine infrastructure investment with policy reform, institutional strengthening, and private sector development. In India, ADB's Subprograms 1 and 2 of the Industrial Corridor Development Program policy-based loan have supported the National Industrial Corridor Development Programme. This article first appeared on the Development Asia website.

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Bangladesh's Planning Commission Aims to Boost Multimodal Transport

28 February 2026: Dhaka, Bangladesh

The Government of Bangladesh's Planning Commission is finalizing a multimodal transport roadmap that reduces the country's logistics strategy from road dependency. Currently, roads handle 80% of national transport demand. The aim is to move toward a more multimodal network to reduce logistics costs, improve safety, and build regional connectivity.

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India's CBIC Highlights Achievements in Trade Facilitation in Geneva

26 February 2026: Geneva, Switzerland

The Government of India's Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of India to the World Trade Organization (WTO), showcased key achievements in Trade Facilitation Agreement compliance and policy implementation, digital customs infrastructure, and capacity building on the sidelines of the WTO Committee on Trade Facilitation meeting in February 2026.

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Nepal Underscores Importance of Regional Cooperation at SAARC Programming Committee Meet

12 February 2026: Kathmandu, Nepal

Mr. Amrit Bahadur Rai, Nepal Foreign Secretary and Chairperson of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Standing Committee, underscored the importance of regional cooperation to bridge the gap between national priorities and international processes, helping ensure mutual benefits and stability within South Asia, during the 62nd meeting of the SAARC Program Committee.

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Bhutan-India Railway Link Set to Begin Construction in 2027

4 February 2026: New Delhi, India

The construction of Kokrajhar-Gelephu railway link is set to begin in the first quarter of 2027 and is expected to enhance connectivity between India and Bhutan. The project is funded by the Government of India and will be Bhutan's first link to India's vast rail network.

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Bhutan and India Revisit Hydropower Cooperation and Discuss Cross-border Transmission Development through 2040

3 February 2026: New Delhi, India

Lyonpo Gem Tshering, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of the Royal Government of Bhutan, Mr. Manohar Lal, Union Minister of Power, and Mr. Shripad Naik, Minister of State for Power, of the Government of India, held high-level ministerial talks to review Bhutan and India's long-standing energy partnership. The discussions focused on deepening cooperation in hydropower development and cross-border transmission planning.

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India and Nepal Ink MoU on Exchanging Pre-arrival Export Information

21 January 2026: New Delhi, India

The Governments of India and Nepal have signed a memorandum of understanding to exchange pre-arrival information on exported goods. The agreement was signed in New Delhi, India, on 21 January by Mr. Vivek Chaturvedi, Chairperson of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs of the Government of India, and Mr. Shyam Prasad Bhandari, Director. The MoU will help facilitate trade and strengthen customs control between the two countries.

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Bridges Chief Visits SASEC Highway Project in Tangail and Sirajganj, Bangladesh

19 January 2026: Dhaka, Bangladesh

Mr. Mohammad Abdur Rouf, Bridges Division secretary and Bangladesh Bridge Authority executive director visited Tangail and Sirajganj districts to inspect construction progress on the SASEC Road Connection Project-2, which is upgrading the Elenga-Hatikumrul-Rangpur highway to four lanes. Mr. Rouf also visited the Jamuna Bridge, which is undergoing regular maintenance work.

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Bangladesh-Nepal Commerce Secretary Level Meeting Agree to Expedite PTA Negotiations

14 January 2026: Dhaka, Bangladesh

The Governments of Bangladesh and Nepal held their Eighth Commerce Secretary Level Meeting to review the progress of bilateral trade and strengthen economic cooperation. Both countries agreed to convene a Trade Negotiating Committee within three months to expedite negotiations on the Preferential Trade Agreement.

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India–Nepal Joint Agriculture Working Group Meeting Commits to Further Strengthen Cooperation

29 December 2025: Kathmandu, Nepal

The Governments of India and Nepal concluded their 9th Joint Agriculture Working Group meeting. This is the first high-level engagement under the new MoU on Agricultural Cooperation signed in April 2025. The meeting affirmed a commitment by both parties to further deepen and strengthen their trade relationship in agriculture.

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Bhutan National Council Approves Bhutan-Thailand Free Trade Agreement

25 December 2025: Thimphu, Bhutan

The National Council of Bhutan unanimously endorsed a free trade agreement between Bhutan and Thailand. The council voted to expand Bhutan's trade outside of South Asia, through a trade agreement that could increase job opportunities, improve ease of trade, and strengthen economic relations with Thailand.

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India, Nepal, Express Satisfaction over Completed Projects

4 December 2025: New Delhi, India

The Governments of India and Nepal held their 11th Lines of Credit Review Meeting, which assessed progress of ongoing projects financed by India's Lines of Credit. They expressed satisfaction with recently completed initiatives and discussed how to further streamline procedures to accelerate project implementation, reflecting a shared commitment to more efficient delivery.

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Bhutan Completes Trial Transshipment via Bangladesh

1 December 2025: Dhaka, Bangladesh

Bhutan has successfully completed its first trial transshipment of cargo originating from Thailand, through Bangladesh's road network and seaports, on 1 December 2025. This operationalizes the "Agreement on the Movement of Traffic-in-Transit between the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Royal Government of Bhutan," signed on 22 March 2023.

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7th Meeting of the Bangladesh–Nepal Joint Steering Committee on Power Sector Cooperation Held in Dhaka

27 November 2025: Dhaka, Bangladesh

The seventh meeting of the Bangladesh–Nepal Joint Steering Committee on Power Sector Cooperation focused on strengthening bilateral collaboration in electricity trade and renewable energy development, with detailed discussions on joint investment in hydropower projects and electricity import arrangements.

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High-level Visit of Prime Minister of Bhutan Deepens Economic Partnership with Bangladesh

24 November 2025: Dhaka, Bangladesh

Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay's state visit to Bangladesh, hosted by Bangladesh Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus, laid the groundwork for expanded cooperation on several sectors, including trade, healthcare, ICT, and tourism.

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Bangladesh and Bhutan Advance the Kurigram-Gelephu Economic Corridor

24 November 2025: Dhaka, Bangladesh

The Governments of Bangladesh and Bhutan are advancing the Kurigram-Gelephu Economic Corridor, a transformative cross-border initiative that will connect a government-to-government Special Economic Zone in Bangladesh's Kurigram district with Bhutan's planned Gelephu Mindfulness City.

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Governments of India and Nepal Sign Rail Connectivity Agreement For Bulk Cargo Transport

13 November 2025: New Delhi, India

Mr. Piyush Goyal, India's Commerce Minister, and Mr. Anil Kumar Sinha, Nepal's Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supplies, finalized the amendment to the Protocol to the Treaty of Transit. This agreement expands rail-based freight movement between Jogbani, India and Biratnagar, Nepal, by broadening the definition of cargo to include both containerized and bulk shipments. The two countries exchanged Letters of Exchange in this regard.

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Bhutan and India Jointly Inaugurate the Punatsangchhu-II Hydroelectric Project

12 November 2025: Thimphu, Bhutan

India Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day state visit to Bhutan further strengthened India–Bhutan relations and highlighted new energy partnerships and infrastructure initiatives, as well as development financing for Bhutan. During the visit, His Royal Highness King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and Prime Minister Modi jointly inaugurated the India-financed 1,020 megawatt Punatsangchhu-II Hydroelectric Project.

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India-supported Hanimaadhoo International Airport Opens in Maldives

9 November 2025: Male, Maldives

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu inaugurated the Hanimaadhoo International Airport, describing the facility as a "gateway to prosperity" for the country's northern region and a symbol of economic transformation. President Muizzu also highlighted that the India-supported airport is a monument to the enduring strength of Maldives-India relations.

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Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to Develop a Joint Tourism Initiative

6 November 2025: Colombo, Sri Lanka

The Governments of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are developing a joint tourism initiative, building on discussions held during foreign office consultations in Colombo. They plan to collaborate on green tourism and create joint circuits focused on tea and Buddhist heritage. They have also agreed to deepen cooperation in maritime connectivity and trade.

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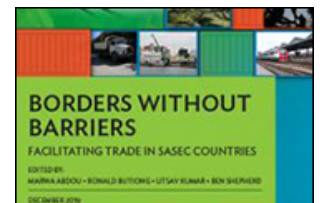
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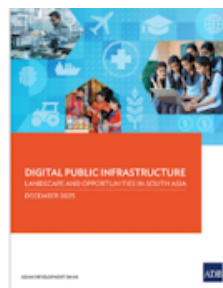
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