

**CHINA-ASEAN CONNECTIVITY:
CHINA'S INTERNAL CHALLENGES
AND EXTERNAL IMPEDIMENTS (II)**

LI Chenyang & LYE Liang Fook

EAI Background Brief No. 675

Date of Publication: 17 November 2011

Executive Summary

1. Beijing and the provinces of Guangxi and Yunnan's support for greater connectivity with ASEAN is evident from initiatives such as the Pan-Beibu Gulf economic cooperation, GMS cooperation, Nanning-Singapore economic corridor and the energy, rail and road link from Kunming to Kyaukpyu (in western Myanmar).
2. Yet, the promotion of China-ASEAN connectivity is not without challenges. Within China, there is a need to ensure that the connectivity strategies proposed by Guangxi and Yunnan take into account regional sensitivities and that rhetoric is translated into actual progress on the ground.
3. There is a need for better coordination among Chinese provinces as the intense competition between Guangxi and Yunnan to improve connectivity with ASEAN may give rise to unnecessary duplication and wastage of resources.
4. On their own, Guangxi and Yunnan would require Beijing's endorsement and mobilization of resources to improve connectivity with ASEAN. Simultaneously, at the central level, there are differences in the level of commitment among the various ministries and agencies in promoting connectivity.
5. Externally, a key challenge to China-ASEAN connectivity is the concern about China's intentions. The distrust between China and Vietnam, for example, has impeded progress on the Pan-Beibu Gulf economic cooperation.
6. Another challenge is the apparent mismatch between China's connectivity plan and ASEAN's Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC). The MPAC

only mentions the Singapore Kunming Railway Line and not other projects such as the Pan-Beibu Gulf economic cooperation.

7. The differences in customs procedures and clearance, and technical standards have further impeded greater infrastructural connectivity among China and the ASEAN countries.
8. Despite these challenges, both ASEAN and China have displayed the political will to broaden and deepen their connectivity with each other. A better appreciation of these impediments will provide a more realistic basis to move their relationship forward.
9. It is also in both parties interest to debunk unsubstantiated reports or comments about the possibility of a Kunming-Singapore high speed railway so that expectations are properly managed and not unduly raised.