Asia Smart City Quarterly Review
Regional Integration

North Bay of Bengal
2023Q4

01 Introduction

Global think tanks or business institutes have currently conducted extensive academic research on "regional integration and development," but concrete guidance for actions to be taken by forward-looking global thinkers and policymakers is lacking. Therefore, Harbor Overseas (http://en.harbor-overseas.com/), the Institute for Global Cooperation and Understanding (iGCU) at Peking University (http://en.igcu.pku.edu.cn/), and the Institute of Policy and Practice at Shenzhen Finance Institute of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen) (SFI, https://sfi.cuhk.edu.cn/en/lists-iopp.html) have initiated a collaboration to publish the Asia Smart City Quarterly Review integrating the vision, knowledge, and experience of the three parties. These pioneering efforts will remind us (as well as global elites and decision-makers in various fields) of our responsibility to lead global regional integration and development and establish global benchmarks. We will identify challenges in the target regions regarding international relations, global governance, and industrial development. We will advise on approaches to building smart cities for regional integration and offer financing suggestions.

Considering the prevalence of Artificial Intelligence Generated Content (AIGC), we will not elaborate on the background but directly identify problems and propose systematic, creative, and feasible solutions.

We are focused on Asia but will also elaborate on other regions.

The object of this discussion is the North Bay of Bengal. We collaborate with four experts from the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) in India, Clemson University (CU) in the US, Infrared City GbmH in Austria (Infrared City), and Peking University (PKU).

02 Questions

Some Asian Economic Corridors, like Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong in China or Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe in Japan, have prospered. In contrast, others, such as the North Bay of Bengal-centered Chattogram (formerly Chittagong) and Kolkata, have fallen short of expectations. The region's key challenges include the lack of high-end industries and jobs, a common issue encountered in many areas across Asia.
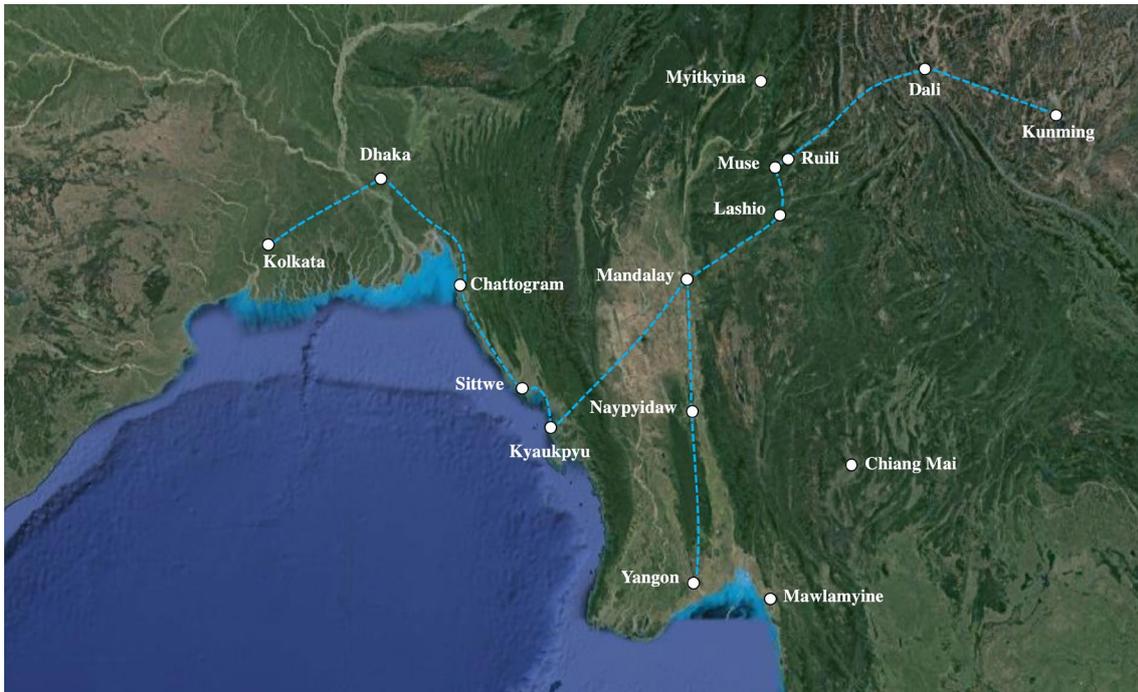

Figure 1: North Bay of Bengal (map by Chen Xi)

03 Approaches

It is generally challenging to construct an integrated economic corridor from Kunming, Mandalay, to Chattogram and Kolkata due to the lack of inter-governmental willingness. However, this report aims to provide a potential approach.

The densely populated cities of Chattogram (more than 6.6 million in 2021) and Kolkata (which was expected to be more than 18 million, as estimated in the 2021 census) are home to several industrial units, including garments, tourism, and hemp textiles. Nevertheless, the soaring population exacerbates employment and environmental issues.

(1) We hold reserved opinions on whether traditional urban planning can attract high-end industries or high-quality jobs to Chattogram and Kolkata. It is probable that establishing logistics centers in the suburbs of Chattogram and Kolkata and the intercity railway connecting the commercial center and suburban areas may encourage people to live and work outside the city center.

(2) It is challenging to foster inter-governmental collaboration, despite the potential for identifying opportunities in a broader geographical space. We assume that the study boundary will extend to include Mandalay (more than 4.4 million in 2018) in Myanmar and Kunming (more than 8.5 million in 2021) in China. Both cities serve as central hubs for jade and stone processing, tourism, and agriculture in this region. However, the creation of the "Kunming-Mandalay-Chattogram-Kolkata" transportation network or industrial chain, as advocated by various governments, is not practical in the short term from both a political and industrial standpoint.

(3) Cultivate endogenous growth drivers for Chattogram and Kolkata, such as enhancing digital literacy. In comparison to Kunming (literacy rate 96.4%) and Mandalay (93.8%), Chattogram has a lower literacy rate (55.55%).

Creating digital scenarios to enhance both individual and business interests can be beneficial. For instance, monitoring the health status of humans and animals, tracking zoonotic diseases, and monitoring environmental pollutants can significantly enhance the overall quality of life. The digital governance system can not only mitigate environmental degradation, including wetland loss, biodiversity decline, air and water pollution, and the disappearance of natural habitats, but also enhance people's digital literacy. Once people master digital technology, they open up the possibilities for entrepreneurship. It is

recommended that these practitioners, local innovation centers, and global interdisciplinary academic institutions establish alliances to receive financial technology training. This can contribute to the creation of a more inclusive job market for the local community.

Everyone (including women and girls) should receive digital technology training. This is not a difficult task. Even if they lack programming skills, they can still use low-code or no-code AI tools to solve problems in their daily lives.

(4) Other challenges
With the advancement of digitalization, local governments should promptly publish digital governance and regulatory standards.

Cyber-security. The government is responsible for combating online violence and crime while safeguarding personal privacy, public safety, and intellectual property. It guides and educates people to avoid online fraud and bullying, identify false information, and refrain from accessing untrusted websites.

Financial security. Digital credit and asset securitization are appealing, but they require a professional supervision system. Additionally, the government should be cautious about the potential for excessive debt when implementing highly advanced technologies or fostering a surge in real estate-oriented sub-urban construction.

Social issues. As the region develops, gentrification of lower-income areas may occur, leading to social segregation and disruption of social cohesion.

04 Conclusions

In the commentary delivered at the G20 India Summit Think Tank Summit in 2023, it was emphasized that the synergy of traditional, digital, institutional, and financial infrastructure is a strategic approach to enhancing urban resilience, social welfare, and attracting investments. However, in many Asian regions, the practical challenges are incredibly complex and may not necessarily achieve the goal of promoting regional integration.

Nonetheless, capital flows towards areas or industries with systematic planning rather than dispersed projects. The government still needs to consider the development of the North Bay of Bengal based on a systematic analysis.

Furthermore, this report aims to capture policymakers' attention regarding various possibilities for this region. Hopefully, collaborative political willingness between China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and India will improve over time and be sustained by future leaders.

05 Afterword

A smart city, in a narrow context, refers to information and communication technologies, but this definition is incomplete. In a broader context, a smart city refers to the integration of urban services, information technology, and governance mechanisms. Therefore, we believe that traditional, digital, institutional, and financial infrastructure must be integrated to promote regional integration. Reference to a regional integration-oriented methodology for smart city development can be found in the 2023 Asia Smart City Ranking, which was released in Beijing on 6 July 2023.

The [02 Questions] section was drafted by Dr. Chen Xi (Harbor Overseas). The [03 Approaches] section was prepared and reviewed by Dr. Chen Xi (Harbor Overseas), Dr. Rumi Aijaz (ORF), Professor James Anderson (CU), Dr. Angelos Chronis (Infrared City), and Professor Chang Chun (PKU). The [04 Conclusion] section was drafted by Dr. Chen Xi (Harbor Overseas). This report was reviewed by Dr. Chen Xi (Harbor Overseas), Professor Wang Dong (iGCU), and Professor Xiao Geng (SFI).

If you are interested in joining this work or business collaboration, please contact general@harbor-overseas.com. Your involvement will bring diversified and innovative ideas, professional knowledge, and a local perspective to our work and the world. Harbor Overseas will send formal invitation letters to prospective external partners.

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