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Abstract

Infrastructure — broadly defined to include road and rail networks, telecommunications, electricity and other utilities — offers both direct and indirect benefits to economic growth. The direct effects include employment and contracts for local firms, while its role as an enabling technology means that a multiplier effect is provided for the economy as a whole. Infrastructure also has a role to play in promoting the efficiency of governance and social cohesion. The relative importance of these factors varies according to the specific conditions applying within a geographical location. The Burmese capital, Naypyidaw, for example, has a symbolic status as the seat of postcolonial Burmese power, while also offering a strategic location from which to govern the country. The role of infrastructure in this case is to promote efficiency of rule and create a network in which the city can form a node connected with economically important locations. In Phnom Penh and Vientiane, by contrast, infrastructure is being used to both promote economic activities and link up with cross-border markets. In all cases, albeit in different ways, capital cities are being repositioned within actual and emerging power networks in order to control and take advantage of processes of international capital accumulation.

Keywords: Mekong region; infrastructure; Phnom Penh; Vientiane; Naypyidaw

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