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**Special Session (SS07) on:**

***Economic Corridors, Development and Regional Cooperation in South Asia and Beyond***

**Organiser:**

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**The aim and scope of the special session:**

South Asia is at a turning point - Driven by the dynamic growth of the Indian economy, it is currently the fastest growing region worldwide. However, South Asia in general and India in particular could be propelled even faster if it was part of a larger integrated and cooperative economic regional frameworks. Therefore, the rise of India on the global economic map has necessitated greater interconnection within its own borders as well as with its South Asian neighbours and beyond. Due to its unique location in the South Asian region, India may function as an extraordinary catalyst. With its sub-continental dimensions, the country connects most of the countries in the region that do not have contiguous borders. This is gaining momentum in the context of the *inter-* and *intra-* regional connectivity between South and Southeast Asia.

To bridge the connectivity gap between different territorial entities, the idea of Economic Corridors (ECs) found its way in programmes for regional cooperation and integration. Furthermore, ECs became a crucial instrument in foreign policy strategies as it becomes a new buzzword in the context of economic stimulation plans and a major platform for deepening regional integration on a global scale. To improve production, trade, infrastructure, spatial planning, manufactural capabilities, services, investments, and the consecutive entrenchment of value chains within the identified geographic framework, the vision of ECs have taken root early on in Southeast Asia, spearheaded by the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) initiative supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). In South Asia, however, the prominence of ECs is a more recent phenomenon which got boosted by the establishment of the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) programme. Subsequently, the concept of ECs is gaining pace and catching attention of Indian political decision-makers, entrepreneurs, academics, and media.

Numerous potential national and transnational ECs are discussed or already in the process of its implementation, like Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (India), Bengaluru-Mumbai EC (India), Amritsar Delhi Kolkata Industrial Corridor (India), East Coast EC (India-Bangladesh-South East Asia), the Trans-Himalayan EC (India, Myanmar, Nepal, Tibet,

China), or the East-West EC (EWEC/India-South East Asia). Besides this, the EC development in South Asia got further prominence through China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to connect Asia with Europe, Middle East, and Africa. But BRI met critical considerations in the region due to several legal issues related to remaining territorial disputes and human rights violations as well as other negative economic and environmental impacts linked to the establishment of its flagship project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

As such, questions are raised also concerning the feasibility of the large-scale projects' implementation and its economic, social, and political impacts. Against this backdrop, the special session will address the following puzzles: Firstly, *what are the perceptions, expectations, interests, and challenges regarding ECs?* Secondly, *which impacts ECs have on the integration of the economically underdeveloped areas?* Thirdly, *can we expect ECs to serve as pioneer projects for further regional economic cooperation and integration within India, South Asia and beyond?* Finally, *by looking at India's EC initiative, what can we generalise for the definition of the concept of EC?*

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