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ADB's new ASEAN initiatives: resilient rivers and a connected digital economy

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Why in the news?

At the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit in Manila on 14 November, ADB President Masato Kanda announced two initiatives seeking to mobilise up to $13 billion in public and private financing by 2030. They complete the announcements under ADB's wider $30 billion ASEAN pledge. A financing target is not the same as money already disbursed or a grant funded entirely by ADB.

The resilient-rivers initiative

The ASEAN Resilient Rivers Initiative seeks up to $8 billion by 2030 for water and food security and protection against floods and droughts. It supports coordinated investment in irrigation, flood defences and water management across river basins. The policy question is how to plan investments across connected water systems rather than treat each project in isolation.

The digital economy platform

The ASEAN Regional Platform for AI and Digital Economy seeks up to $5 billion by 2030. It supports implementation of the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement through policy reforms and investment in digital infrastructure, cross-border payments, verifiable IDs, cybersecurity and AI readiness. Better interoperability can help smaller firms participate in digital trade.

Delivery and policy questions

ADB will help identify bankable projects, support project preparation and mobilise financing. Delivery should be assessed through reduced risk, wider access and benefits for communities. For India, the useful analytical connections are regional cooperation, river-basin planning, adaptation and interoperable digital systems. The release concerns ASEAN initiatives, not approval of a new loan to India.

Mains practice

How can integrated river-basin planning strengthen water and food security? Explain regional cooperation with reference to ADB's ASEAN initiative. (150 words)

Answer outline

Introduction: Treat a river basin as a connected system of water, farming, ecosystems and settlements.

Body: Link upstream and downstream decisions; coordinate flood and drought planning; balance irrigation with ecosystem needs; discuss shared data and cross-border coordination. Separate financing targets from disbursement. Assess project preparation, accountability and community participation as delivery conditions.

Conclusion: Judge success by reduced risk, reliable water and community benefits as well as finance mobilised.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What does the $13 billion figure mean?

It is the combined target to mobilise up to $8 billion for rivers and $5 billion for the digital platform by 2030.

Is it additional to the $30 billion pledge?

No. The two initiatives form part of the wider $30 billion ASEAN pledge.

Has the entire amount been disbursed?

No. The announcement concerns financing mobilisation targets, not completed disbursement or an entirely ADB-funded grant.

What does the rivers initiative support?

Modern irrigation, flood defences and improved water management across river basins.

Sources

- https://www.adb.org/news/adb-completes-30-billion-asean-pledge-13-billion-resilient-rivers-and-digital-economy

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