

# Belt and Road Initiative making difference in Asia-Pacific region

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HONG KONG - The China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative entered its fifth year in 2018, offering fresh impetus to economic development and integration in the Asia-Pacific region, while bringing tangible benefits to the people along the route.

The initiative, proposed in 2013, refers to the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. It is aimed at building a trade and infrastructure network connecting Asia with Europe and Africa along ancient trade routes.

A series of important achievements have been made in the development of major infrastructure connectivity projects under the Belt and Road Initiative during 2018.

In early December, the first T-shaped concrete beam of the China-Laos railway was successfully erected in Laos' capital Vientiane. It marked a key milestone as the construction has been transferred from substructure to superstructure, according to the constructor China Railway No 2 Engineering Group.

The construction of a China-Laos railway, the first overseas route to connect with the railway system in China, starts from Boten, the northern Laos town bordering China, connects with the Chinese Yuxi-Mohan Railway in Yunnan province to the north, and reaches Vientiane in the south.

It is expected to open by the end of 2021, slashing the travel time between Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan province and Vientiane to half a day.

Another key connectivity project under the Belt and Road Initiative, the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway in Indonesia, also entered the stage of comprehensive implementation in June this year.

### **Benefits for people**

In August this year, the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge opened to traffic. It is the first cross-sea bridge in the Maldives and an iconic project of the two countries in co-building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

Connecting the capital Male and neighboring Hulhule island where the Maldives' main international airport is located, the 2-km bridge makes it possible for locals and tourists to transfer between the two islands on land within five minutes.

"The boat ride between the two islands was affected by many factors such as the weather," a local schoolgirl named Aisha said.

Rehendhi Rabindan, a foreman in a restaurant in Hulhumale, said the bridge helped bring more customers to his restaurant.

"On weekends, many people living in Male come here for dinner. The staff are constantly busy," he said, adding that "many guests who live in Male can order take-away and pick up the food within 10 minutes."