



**Regional Policy Dialogue
on
Connectivity Imperatives in the Bay of
Bengal Region**

New Delhi, India, May 2-3, 2018

A Report of the Proceedings

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Executive Summary

CUTS International organised a two day Regional Policy Dialogue in New Delhi, which witnessed participation from various groups including government representatives, private players, multi-lateral agencies, academia, think-tanks and media from the five countries viz., Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) and Myanmar. The first day of the deliberations stressed on the importance of connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region and what roles can multilateral agencies and international allies including the US and UK play in this regard. The major observations of the deliberations included-

- Empowered Working Committee with participation from all countries of the Bay of Bengal region is the key to push for better connectivity in the region.
- Gains from regional connectivity emanating from connectivity initiatives should be inclusive of women and other marginal vulnerable communities in the region.
- The connectivity initiative in the BBIN+M is expected to contribute in identifying value chains in the region and help in more enhanced trade facilitation.

Some of the key observations that came out from the discussions are given below under the broad heading-

A. Impact of connectivity initiatives on livelihood and gender

- Any connectivity initiative in the region would have different impacts on livelihoods of different groups of stakeholders due to heterogeneity in their nature.
- Government ought to find alternative jobs and vocational training for those who may lose their livelihood due to connectivity initiatives. This will ensure that the gains of trade are fairly distributed across the group of stakeholders.
- In several cases, the truckers and labourers in one country are apprehensive about the rules and regulations in the other country, which necessitates proper sharing of information regarding the rules and regulations between member countries.
- Poverty, lack of education and increasing migration in the border states may lead to increase in communicable diseases. Preventive measures to address these issues must be taken by the respective governments and civil societies in the region.
- Policy makers must also look into issues of concentration of wealth in large cities due to increased connectivity and stagnancy in the growth of small towns located at the borders.
- While women participation in the corridors is generally low, limited to certain kind of work, as labourers or support service providers, there are few instances of successful women entrepreneurs at the borders in all the five countries.
- To encourage more women participation in trade and transport facilities, the connectivity initiatives should emphasise hugely on security and safety aspect of women along the corridors and create gender sensitive trade infrastructure.

B. Infrastructural connectivity

- Some of the major infrastructural issues in the border regions of the five countries include poor roads, lack of testing laboratories and inadequate customs offices, poor supply of electricity and slow internet connections, low

cross border agency coordination and complex regulatory procedures, which needs to be addressed as soon as possible for facilitating smooth cargo and passenger connectivity.

- Industrial infrastructure and trade infrastructure have a symbiotic relationship. Such infrastructure can help rehabilitating those stakeholders who are at losing because of connectivity initiatives in the region.
- Economic corridor development along with connectivity and trade facilitation will enable countries to participate in regional/global value chains. Such facilities will be crucial for the development and growth of land-locked countries in the region.
- Trade procedural reforms and transport infrastructure need to complement each other.
- Connectivity initiatives like BBIN, including Myanmar needs to have headquarter or an institutional arrangement.
- Economic zones/ trade hubs can be put in place along the border regions to create more livelihood opportunities.

C. Software of connectivity

- Procedural complexities, cumbersome clearance procedures, ineffective transit agreements, lack of insurance guarantee mechanisms and asymmetries in information sharing within the member countries are some of the common barriers related to the soft infrastructure.
- Implementation of TIR (Transports Internationaux Routiers) convention will provide higher security to cargo vehicles and create a unified regional market access to other TIR members like China and Central Asian countries. The convention has been already ratified by India and other countries in the region should also consider acceding to the UN's convention.
- Efficient circulation of information and higher quality of risk management in the region is needed on priority basis. The governments must ensure effective cross-border coordination between various agencies and government departments.
- Harmonisation of standards, documents and processes across the member countries is imperative for proper implementation of any connectivity initiative. Mutual recognition of standards between the member countries is also important.

D. Role of private sector in leveraging connectivity

- Role of public-private partnerships is significant in areas where government remains less effective in the region.
- Private interventions may be needed in areas including digitisation, infrastructural upgradation, capacity building of stakeholders and identification and removal of certain handicaps in the process of expediting trade connectivity.

The panellists finally agreed that every connectivity initiative in the BBIN+M region is very important for regional integration but their successful implementation entirely depends on the political will of various governments.

Proceedings

Day 1: Wednesday, May 2, 2018

1 Introduction

1.1 CUTS International organised the Regional Policy Dialogue with support from UK's Department for International Development and US State Department on "Connectivity Imperatives in the Bay of Bengal Region," in Hotel Metropolitan, New Delhi, on May 2&3, 2018. The objective of the dialogue was to discuss, disseminate and validate the research findings and key advocacy points that have emerged from the CUTS study on 'Creating an enabling and inclusive policy and political economy discourse for trade, transport and transit facilitation in and among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Myanmar', in order to chart out a forward-looking action agenda for enhanced cooperation in the Bay of Bengal region.

2. Opening: Emerging Trends in Regionalism and Strategic Issues for Better Connectivity in the Bay of Bengal Region

This was a high-level plenary with speakers who shared their insights on emerging strategic and geopolitical issues impacting connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region. The session highlighted on how countries in the Bay of Bengal region are looking at regionalism at present and what priorities define their approach to the region.



L-R: Purshottam Ojha, Kinley Dorji, Amitava Chakraborty, Robert Garverick, Pradeep S Mehta, Jaya Singh Verma, Toe Aung Myint

2.1 Pradeep Singh Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International - South Asian nations are unable to take benefits of intra-regional trade because of feeble connectivity. The relevance of the BBIN+M initiative cannot be overemphasised, and the urgency to contemplate measures to sort out differences and disputes among concerned countries is important to appreciate. Addressing challenges to effective implementation of the initiative is imperative. Including women in the story of growth emanating from trade facilitation and creating livelihood opportunities for possible losers are some of the major concerns.

2.2 Jaya Singh Verma, Programme Manager Asia Regional Team, Department for International Development, British High Commission - Given the recent developments taking place in the BBIN countries, this regional policy dialogue is a very timely initiative. She discussed the other programmes that are run by British High Commission in the BBIN region. The objectives of these programmes are resting on the needs to highlight the evidence about possible transformative results, so that we can identify regional norms. Expected outcomes include identification of value chains and ensuring trade facilitation. She mentioned that people-to-people contact, multimodal connectivity, creating gender sensitive trade infrastructure, simplifying trade procedures with introduction of digital technology, and initiatives similar to these will promote regional integration.

2.3 Robert Garverick, Minister Counsellor for Economic, Environmental, Science and Technology Affairs, US Embassy in New Delhi - The US envisions a peaceful and prosperous Asia-Pacific region, which includes more than half of the world population, hence, the urge for better connectivity in the region. South Asia unfortunately lags behind Southeast Asia – one of the least integrated regions of the world. Connectivity initiatives are based on commitment to international law and steps towards economic growth. Infrastructure, therefore, comes to be the focus of the endeavour for sustainable growth for people of the region – ranging from road maintenance to electricity generation. Such infrastructural development and capacity enhancement in countries across the region will have multiplier effects. Sovereignty is respected and a rule-based system underlines the entire vision of the US.

2.4 Amitava Chakraborty, Director, Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute - Mr. Chakraborty explained how Bangladesh's economy was benefitted from enhancement of regional trade – by almost 6 per cent. Despite various agreements, intra-regional trade is still struggling. So it is important to consider diversification of products of trade, harmonisation of standards and simplification of trade procedures, connecting regional value chains. It is costlier to trade within the region than with the countries of rest of the world. BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement (BBIN-MVA) will facilitate cross border trade, from which Bangladesh stands to benefit immensely. Geo-strategic position of Bangladesh will allow it to derive immense mileage from such connectivity initiatives as BBIN–MVA and function as a transit point between India and China. Bangladesh will also seek to mainstream women and marginalised sections in the trade that will be facilitated by measures like the MVA. The key would be to ensure better coordination in the region for enhancement of trade.

2.5 Dasho Kinley Dorji, Former Secretary, Ministry of Information and Communication, Royal Government of Bhutan - Mr. Dorji shared his thoughts on regional cooperation – South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), etc. Nothing much has changed over the decades, despite dramatic developments. Paradoxically, '*goondas*' are creating problems for cross-country truck drivers – which can hardly be encapsulated by diplomatic and high level negotiations, agreements and dialogues. This study will highlight 'real' problems, including lack of political will among countries that retard connectivity in this region. There are real problems on the ground which needs to be addressed. He reiterated difficulties faced in intra–regional trade, and highlighted the need to disseminate information about the MVA across the stakeholders in the region.

2.6 Toe Aung Myint, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Government of Myanmar - Existing level of trade has not met its economic potential – over 85 per cent of Myanmar's external trade is with Asia – yet only 5 per cent of that is with South Asia. Being appreciative of India's initiative in promoting infrastructural development in Myanmar, he stated that such initiatives will lead to better connectivity with South and Southeast Asia. He said that coordinated effort is indispensable to better connectivity. Only symbolic agreements will not yield results, there is need for changes on the ground by way of transformative innovations in trade norms and practices.

2.7 Purushottam Ojha, Former Commerce Secretary of Nepal - Purushottam harped on the fact that connectivity is a medium for poverty reduction, integration of the economy, welfare of the people, enhancing livelihood opportunities of people and gender aspects. He recommended connectivity at multiple levels with four B's, bilateral level, BBIN-level (multilateral), BIMSTEC level (regional), BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar) level (extra-regional). The drives of connectivity include physical connectivity; harmonisation of customs procedures, simplified and creative adoption of technology in trade facilitation, particularly in the information and communication technology, etc. He also commented on multilateral connectivity referring to recent initiatives between India and Nepal, rail, road and inland waterways connectivity. Political economy questions will have to be resolved; cross border terrorism, criminal activities that pose difficulties in movement across the region, etc are the issues that are faced by smooth connectivity, must be incorporated to address these myriad concerns.

2.8 Sandeep Kumar, Commissioner (Customs & Export Promotion), Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, Government of India - The region harbours a large portion of the global population. Earnest efforts of the regional countries will upgrade connectivity across the region. People of these countries had indulged in seamless cross-border movements down the ages - the present drive aspires to restore and strengthen intra-regional connectivity to enhance trade and ensure benefits for people of the region. The activities of Reliance, Pran, Lafarge among others, are pointers to that trend. The border-*haats* between India and Bangladesh bear testimony to the people-to-people connect that has cemented ties between the two countries. But issues remained to be addressed to catapult the region to a high growth trajectory, lack of infrastructure, lack of coordination mechanisms and complicated and convoluted customs procedures that clog border clearance systems. Planned improvements are under way and so there is no room for pessimism.

Taking a cue from the discussions, Professor Mustafizur Rahman, while stressing on the need of having a single window system for clearance, cited the example of the single Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) window which, according to him, could be adopted as a model for ensuring better inter-operability of the system across borders. Pradeep Singh Mehta stressed on the need on a wider dissemination of protocols beyond the border checkpoints.

Purushottam Ojha emphasised on the need of having a system that ensures simplified and harmonised paperwork across the region. The discussion touched upon the issue of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, and the participants agreed to the point made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that this initiative will create a group of deeply indebted countries. Mr Dorji made a point by stating that there is a need for strong regional institutions and an empowered committee at the regional level to make connectivity real and to deal with the manifold issues that are likely to be thrown up.

BOOK RELEASE - SURESH PRABHU HONOURS PRADEEP MEHTA FOR LIFETIME CONTRIBUTION TO CONSUMER WELFARE



L-R: Sanjay Baru, Mohan Kumar, Pradeep S Mehta, Nitin Desai, Shakti Sinha, Mustafizur Rahman, Abhishek Kumar

A living treasure as has been called by Professor Jagdish Bhagwati - Pradeep Mehta, the founder Secretary General of CUTS International and one of the stalwarts of civil society movements, was honoured on May 2, 2018 evening in New Delhi for his lifetime contribution to consumer welfare in India and around the globe.

The honour was formally bestowed by the Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, and Civil Aviation, Suresh Prabhu through a video message at a book release and panel discussion event organised by CUTS International. Prabhu, who was away to South Africa, said Pradeep Mehta's guidance on issues of economic policy to him and others have been extremely valuable in shaping public policy.

A book, aptly titled – 'Putting Consumers first - Essays in Honour of Pradeep Mehta' and edited by the noted political economist Sanjaya Baru with Abhishek Kumar from CUTS International was released in his honour. Over 45 experts on Trade, Governance and Regulation from around the world contributed essays on these topics to mark Mehta's contribution in these areas.

Some of the prominent authors who have contributed to this rich book of knowledge include WTO Director General Roberto Azevêdo, Shashi Tharoor, Sanjaya Baru, Kishore Mahubani, Peter Varghese, Mohan Kumar, C Rangarajan and Secretary General of UNCTAD, Mukhisa Kituyi.

While noted economist, Jagdish Bhagwati has written the adulatory foreword, former Railways Minister and consumer activist, Dinesh Trivedi, MP has crafted a wonderful preface.

Future of Trade Multilateralism

The book release was followed by a panel discussion on the Future of Trade Multilateralism in the era of Unilateralism. Chaired by Nitin Desai, former Under Secretary General of the United Nations, the panel reposed faith in the WTO despite the challenges being faced by the global trade body in the wake of bilateralism and unilateralism.

The star studded panel included Sanjaya Baru, Ambassador Mohan Kumar, Mustafizur Rahman, Shakti Sinha and Pradeep Mehta. Unanimously, the panel felt that the attacks on WTO will not sustain as the body has in-built resilience and is imperative in global governance. It will have to reform some of its regimes such as the dispute settlement system and incorporate the development dimensions keeping the Sustainable Development Goals, 2030 agenda in mind to improve its wider acceptance.

Among the participants were experts from India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar. The occasion also came at a time when Pradeep Mehta turned 70 and CUTS International, the global advocacy group and think tank that he founded completed 35 glorious years.

Under Pradeep Mehta's leadership the think tank launched its sixth overseas centre in Washington DC in April 2018, thus making CUTS International the first ever Indian think tank to have presence in the US.

Day 2: Thursday, May 3, 2018

3. Session 1: Linking Connectivity to Livelihoods

This session deliberated on how better connectivity between and among countries in the Bay of Bengal region impact job creation and sustainable livelihoods. It looked at the evidence presented from the recent relevant studies to discuss trends and come up with recommendations for the promotion of sustainable livelihoods, with a particular focus on women's entrepreneurship.



L-R: SwanPyae Oo, Sagar Prasai, Atiur Rahman, Pushpa Chhetri, Anasua Basu Roy Chaudhury, Mustafizur Rahman, Debolina Mukherjee

3.1 Atiur Rahman, Chairman, Unnayan Shamannay and Former Governor, Bangladesh Bank - Prof. Rehman, as Chair for the session set the ball rolling by drawing attention to regional initiatives for better connectivity -- the focus is ultimately on the human dimension and people ought to benefit; without this the entire endeavour will remain vacuous. So it is important to gauge people's levels of awareness. We were mentally connected already; with greater popular endorsement and support, there will be greater buy-in. Level of skills and capacities of people ought to be complemented and for this purpose, sharing of information by and among the countries concerned is imperative and there is great potential for cooperation.

3.2 Debolina Mukherjee, Policy Analyst, CUTS International - Debolina talked about impact of connectivity initiatives on livelihood opportunities. People on the ground are heterogeneous and so the initiative will impact different categories of stakeholders differently. Numerous livelihood opportunities have cropped up at nodes along the corridor but some like labourers and support service providers fear loss or reduction of jobs. Small farmers are operating already through middlemen

are unsure of how the MVA will benefit them. Exporters and importers will be benefited and so will be the tourists. But lack of information among various stakeholders across countries is a serious challenge and needs to be addressed. Women participation is generally low, limited to certain kinds of laborious work and support service providers. The Government ought to find alternative jobs, vocational training, and information sharing to ensure sustainable livelihood. Security needs to be beefed up to encourage more women participation and government has to provide technical training to male and female residents.

3.3 Mustafizur Rahman Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh - Complementing the study on the MVA, he expressed that small losers cannot really make hurdles but these are the big guys who need to be identified. Not only transport corridors but economic corridors should be highlighted and this perspective must be adopted by policy makers across the countries to come up with additional inputs. They need to be looked at not as control points but as crossing points. Additional steps to be taken for potential losers to be absorbed into jobs because some changes will be inevitable. Agreements like the MVA for effective implementation requires smooth political climate across the countries because tensions at the border can always dampen such initiatives. Dr. Atiur Rahman (the chair) added that it is not politicians alone, but, society as well must play a responsible role, particularly the media, which often creates hype and escalates tensions. Corporate social responsibility is also important here.

3.4 Pushpa Chhetri, Director, Bhutan Media and Communications Institute, Bhutan - Pushpa agrees that there is a general lack of awareness about the crux of the matter and how the MVA impacts various stakeholders. It will be up to the policy makers to derive the right inputs from the perceptions of various stakeholders that the study tables. Bhutanese truckers feel threatened and unsafe about plying across other countries. They deal with endless documentation and their stories and apprehensions get percolated down to other categories. Hence rules and regulations need to be clarified and disseminated. With thin borders, a problem on one side will also create ripples on the other side. Many women are engaged as support service providers but there is no 24x7 restaurant along the highways and this creates inconveniences among truckers travelling for long durations. Information sharing will be the safety net for those who have to move across borders and corridors. Farmers and entrepreneurs often have to depend on middlemen because of lack of information. Also infrastructural inadequacies like the lack of storage facilities provide negative feelings among stakeholders. Dr. Atiur Rahman commented that such information gaps only magnify the relevance of the project undertaken by CUTS. Informed decisions by policy makers are the need of the hour.

3.5 Anasua Basu R Choudhury, Observer Research Foundation, Kolkata - Anasua drew attention to public health hazards in border areas as these could also impact livelihood concerns. The borders are porous in this part of the world and migration is a continuous flow. Causes of HIV aids have risen to 2.17 million - particularly in border states between India and Myanmar. Poverty and lack of education is leading to increase in communicable diseases. Inability of host countries to respond to migrants' behaviour and inability of migrants to seek help at medical centres of host country is also compounding the problem. So impact of migration on border

residents needs to be factored into the entire story of connectivity. It is important to have a synergy between various agencies across borders and to have civil society initiatives to address the problem. In this regard, Dr. Atiur Rahman intervened that this is not a law and order problem but a serious health problem, which needs to be addressed.

- 3.6 **Sagar Prasai, India Country Representative, The Asia Foundation** - Connectivity boils down to connecting sites of production and consumption to each other. Roads and waterways have increased but diversity of economic activity has not happened. The economy of several small towns has not grown. We have not looked into issues of concentration of wealth; economy of Siliguri (West Bengal, India) has not grown at all for instance. Therefore, he emphasised that there is a need to look at differential impacts of connectivity initiatives; have access to finance; telecommunications need to be looked into; multi-sectorial coordination across highways need to be combined with other support systems; and with that everything that is weak in the border areas like education, health, etc should be reversed.
- 3.7 **SwanPyae Oo, Project Manager, Myanmar Marketing Research & Development Ltd, Myanmar** - Highlighted that their study of corridors between Myanmar and Bangladesh and India revealed a lack of awareness and varied perceptions across stakeholders. Support service providers feel they will benefit but major concern is loss of jobs for local labour in the border areas due to the seamless movement across borders. Local traders are likely to be left behind and local transporters from other countries are worried that their work will be swallowed up by competition from other countries. Implementation of the MVA must provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the losers. Banks will have to take steps to facilitate payment systems and trade transactions. Myanmar's ethos is of masculine nature and the government is addressing the issue by discouraging gender discrimination. Weaker physical strength seems to be the main reason for fewer women being employed in jobs pertaining to the trade process. Governments must commit themselves to the improvement of regional ties. The right amount of investment must be encouraged in the border areas.

4. Session 2: Leveraging infrastructure for better physical connectivity

This session looked at the status of existing infrastructure and the related gaps, how on-going and planned infrastructure development can be leveraged for optimum outcomes from enhanced connectivity and what more needs to be done at the national and regional levels in terms of physical infrastructure, to come up with specific and prioritised infrastructure-related recommendations. The session also spent some time on how to look at infrastructure from a gender lens.



L-R: Rajan Sharma, Karma Pemba, Joseph George, Anil Bamba, Thet Zaw Win, Soumya Chattopadhyay, Monoj Kumar Roy, Sarbjit Singh

4.1 Chair: Anil Bamba, Member (Planning & Development), Land Ports Authority of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India - Mr. Bamba began by drawing attention to bottlenecks and queues at the border at Birganj (Nepal) and Raxaul (India), the biggest Land Custom Station (LCS) on the Indo-Nepal border, and the need for integrated Check Posts (ICPs) to facilitate connectivity and trade between countries. Further, he added that there is also a need to have facilities installed at the zero point.

4.2 Presentation: Sarbjit Singh, Policy Analyst, CUTS International - Infrastructure includes those that lie on the border and those that lie beyond the border. He highlighted that international roads are not in good conditions. Conditions of approach roads cause delay in trade, lack of testing labs at the customs stations, non-availability of power backup systems, intermittent internet availability, manual inspections also cause delay. Further complex regulatory procedures, lack of within and cross border agencies' coordination hamper work. He added that

recommendations must address these concerns by providing better roads, ICPs and Inland Container Depots (ICDs), among others.

- 4.3 **Monoj Kumar Roy, Former Additional Secretary (FTA), Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh** – Mr Roy indicated how bridges can benefit people living in these two countries. Physical connectivity is imperative for improved trade. MVA is only a tool for connectivity for attaining economic development. Governments need to invest in infrastructure development to derive optimum mileage out of this tool, cross border transshipment agreements ought to materialise. No institutional arrangements are in place. SAARC has its secretariat and this kind of institutional edifice is important.
- 4.4 **Karma Pemba, Chief Transport Officer, Road Safety & Transport Authority, Royal Government of Bhutan** - People are confused about the contents of this agreement. Bhutan has various trade agreements with other countries in the region but regional connectivity demands infrastructure. Possibility of rail connections with India is being explored but various land issues stand in the way. Transportation costs in Bhutan are three times higher than in India. Infrastructural facilities must approximate international standards. Major focus of Bhutan ought to be on the improvement of road conditions and development of dry ports and airports.
- 4.5 **Joseph George, Consultant, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific** - Industrial infrastructure and trade infrastructure have a symbiotic relationship. Trade procedural reforms and transport infrastructure need to complement each other. Paperless trade could be envisioned and such reforms will not necessitate the infrastructure that we may be planning right now. The space now devoted to parking lots, for instance, can be converted to industrial infrastructure. The reverse connection is also there – trade infrastructure also depends on industry infrastructure. Revenue generated from taxing industry can help maintain roads say in the Northeast India, which is prone to rain and land slide damages. People cannot be ignored; losers can be rehabilitated by industrial infrastructure. If procedures at the border can be moved into the territory, then space could be availed for industrial infrastructure.
- 4.6 **Soumya Chattopadhyay, Consultant, Regional Cooperation, Asian Development Bank** - Economic corridor development is also focused along with connectivity and trade facilitation by the Asian Development Bank. This will enable participating countries to connect to value chains; particularly land locked countries to connect with each other. India has taken a loan from ADB to build a bridge across to Nepal, which will benefit Nepal too, and such instances of regional cooperation can be exemplary in strengthening regional connectivity. This also highlights the need for better coordination among the countries. Passenger protocol has been signed by Bangladesh, India and Nepal. BBIN MVA will neither hamper nor override existing bilateral arrangements among the countries. Logistics (transport and related) is also an important consideration.
- 4.7 **Thet Zaw Win, Director, Ministry of Construction, Government of Myanmar** - Passenger travel has increased in Myanmar and there is need for infrastructure up-

gradation, particularly for land transport, as the current road conditions are good. The Ministry of Construction has taken up projects to extensively upgrade the conditions of road and bridges in the country. They are expecting to attain the improved road network by the year 2030. Public private partnerships are encouraged to attain these types of projects.

4.8 Rajan Sharma, Oriental Freight Service and Former President, Nepal Freight Forwarders Association

He was optimistic that such initiatives will entail advantages like speeding up procedures and reducing costs and dealing with other threats like resistance to change and illegal trade, among others. Along with infrastructure, there must be laboratory and quarantine facilities and the right types of equipment. Governments must not use integrated check posts as money earning centres. Authorised economic operators must be thought of as a tool for use. Soft and hard infrastructure need to go hand-in-hand and Government and private players have to cooperate.

5. Session 3: Software of Connectivity: The BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement and Other Initiatives

This session focused on the current status and possible challenges to the implementation of the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement and examined how tools like the TIR Convention can enable and facilitate the implementation of such connectivity initiatives. It discussed the implications of a successful implementation of the BBIN MVA for other connectivity initiatives in the region.



L-R: Rash Bihari Rauniar, Md. Sanuwarul Kabir, Hla Hla Yee, Mustafizur Rahman, Abdul Matlub Ahmad, Satish K. Reddy, Surendar Singh

5.1 Chair: Mustafizur Rahman, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh - Professor Rahman said that though hard side of the infrastructure is important for the implementation of the BBIN motor vehicles agreement but at the same time soft infrastructure cannot be ignored. He stated that acceding to the UN's TIR convention can be a step towards the improvement in soft infrastructure. Additionally, it will provide seamless, multimodal connectivity through the lens of BBIN motor vehicle agreement.

5.2 Surendar Singh, Fellow, CUTS International - Operational instruments are needed to implement frameworks like the MVA. The TIR Convention has been ratified by India and it can serve as an important tool in this regard. Basic impediments in respect of software connectivity include procedural complexities, cumbersome and divergent clearance procedures, ineffective transit agreements, transport, regulations and transit issues, lack of insurance guarantee mechanisms and asymmetries in information sharing. Implementation of TIR convention will provide higher security of cargo vehicles and will create a unified regional market access to other TIR members like China and Central Asian countries, over and above providing a higher degree of

simplified procedures. There will be efficient circulation of information and higher quality of risk management. There are other regional connectivity initiatives, from which leverage can be taken through identification of areas of convergence.

5.3 Abdul Matlub Ahmad, President, India – Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry

- There have been sustained efforts to enhance regional cooperation by bringing India and Bangladesh closer to each other. The BBIN MVA can go a long way in that direction. If bilateral harmonisation is possible, then, same is applicable to regional harmonisation. Tracker systems today can address problems like theft of cargo in transshipment. But BBIN-MVA needs to have a body/ an institutional arrangement and also, economic zones can be put in place. Bangladesh can be the headquarter to serve as the institutional base for effective implementation of the MVA. The Rahamutalla connectivity award for the media was suggested for effective contribution in this regard.

5.4 Rash Bihari Rauniar, Department of Agriculture, Guwahati, Assam, India

- Mr. Rauniar reiterated the similar views and reminded that there is still a long way to go. Traffic volumes between two countries, if they do not match, means transport cost on one side is very high. There will be resistance from local transporters; therefore, harmonisation of documents will become difficult. Hindrances also lie in the lack of harmony between signs in two countries and varying costs of equipment across countries. He suggested a common hub in Siliguri for harbouring vehicles from all countries. He ended by stating that harmonised documentation is something that is imperative.

5.5 Sanuwarul Kabir, Assistant Commissioner, NBR, Government of Bangladesh

- Mr. Kabir clarified that portals at present are available, accessible and most notifications are available in English. Bangladesh is moving towards simplified documentation and integrated check posts can strengthen trade and connectivity. Electronic data interchange across customs stations can help to reduce paper work and documentation. The chair clarified that what we should not fail to notice is that every country in its own way is upgrading its systems, so harmonisation is not a long way.

5.6 Hla Hla Yee, General Secretary, Myanmar International Freight Forwarders Association

- Ms. Yee clarified that nascent states like Myanmar need to learn from such practices across the region. Myanmar has challenges by way of lack of internet connectivity in several areas and lack of single windows systems, among others. Since 2017, Japanese systems in clearance have started to be used along with GPS in trucks (Automated Cargo Clearance Systems). Myanmar also remains concerned with loss of jobs created by systematic change-overs; nonetheless efforts to improve and upgrade trade procedures are under way, which will reduce trade costs and informal trade. Multimodal transportation is also being contemplated.

5.7 Satish Reddy, Consultant, Asian Development Bank

- He discussed the BBIN MVA topic. He further added that, among others, one pillar of this MVA is mutual recognition of transport documentation. The means of transport and cargo-in-transit will be free from payment of duties. Countries agree on passenger protocols, but cargo protocols are under consideration. There has to be multi country insurance

and issuance of permits since the whole idea is to reduce documentation. From the perspective of trade, borders are to become invisible to the extent possible. There is a lack of inland clearance facilities in all the countries and development of dry ports is necessary. Information gap is a major hindrance to trade.

6. Session 4: Private Sector Perspectives on Leveraging Connectivity

This session discussed the envisaged and desired outcomes of connectivity initiatives in the region as perceived by private sector players. It collated private sector inputs on various sectors, projects and dialogues, which are to be prioritised and at what levels. The idea was to come up with a prioritised action agenda to enable the private sector to leverage various connectivity initiatives in the region.



L-R: Myo Thant, Kailash Bajimaya, Damchae Dem, M P Bezbaruah, Sudhir Chandra Nath, Prithviraj Nath

6.1 M.P. Bezbaruah, Former Member, North Eastern Council, Ministry of the Development of North East Region, Government of India - He started the session by stressing that connectivity initiatives need to be pushed by private players. Livelihood and development issues have unfortunately got hijacked by security and other issues and what is needed is a holistic approach, an integrated view on connectivity to even include Myanmar, Thailand and Southeast Asia. In this regard, the private sector has to be a key mover to address timely completion of projects that are underway.

6.2 Prithviraj Nath, Associate Director, CUTS International - South Asian growth projection is going to infuse private players with a healthy dose of optimism. There is a technological revolution underway, which is going to impact trade processes. There are challenges on the ground like financial connectivity, transfer of money across countries in the region, creating job opportunities, enabling gender, reconciling nationalistic and ethnic conflicts and all these make our task daunting. There are various sectors with possibilities, where people are found to be engaged and trust needs to be built mutually. In all this, private participation and partnerships seem indispensable.

6.3 Damchae Dem, Founder, Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs - She mentioned that our focus should be on '*people*' in all the countries in the region. Policies enunciated at supra-state levels must not turn a deaf ear to the needs of small land-locked countries, which harbour proportionately small populations. Small communities within these small countries must be secure, lest they get washed by larger formations and edifices that seem to rock the entire region. Three points for consideration that can help are – digitalisation will help to reach out to markets, cooperation and coordination among these countries is important.

6.4 Sudhir Chandra Nath, Advance Chemical Industries Limited, Bangladesh - Almost 47 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh is involved in agriculture. Connectivity does not directly address food security but it certainly impacts economic development. Often perishable goods (as with hybrid rice seeds) get detained at the border and also, loss of quality of seeds impacts farmers adversely. Private initiatives are crucial to make up for governmental paralysis on many occasions as in Bangladesh to demonstrate the linkage between connectivity and food security and prosperity of farmers. He recommended capacity building of stakeholders, infrastructural upgradation, and harmonisation of procedures and their simplification.

6.5 Myo Thant, Managing Director, Zar and Zar Co. Ltd., Myanmar - Mr. Thant, a private sector representative, expressed hope in India's Act East Policy. Trade volume in Myanmar is on the rise. This year Myanmar's farmers are suffering because of lack of exports in pulses and beans, which are generally grown by Myanmar farmers for Indian markets. He suggested that free movement of people across these countries will be a crucial step towards strengthening connectivity and integration between the countries, for both trade and tourism. Promotion of sea transport between India and Myanmar can also boost trade between the two countries.

6.6 Kailash Bajimaya, Nepal Chamber of Commerce - Mr. Bajimaya reiterated the need for boosting trade in the region through improved connectivity rather than mere tariff reduction. Business community will have a growing role and responsibility in this regard.

7. Closing: Key Policy Recommendations and An Action Agenda

This session focused on bringing together the suggestions in the form of either policy and/or practice changes or specific business/investment opportunities/ideas that emerged from all the different sessions. A compilation of the key recommendations were presented by CUTS International followed by reflections from the government officials and experts to sum-up the key takeaways from the dialogue.



L-R: Badrul Hassan Babul, Enamul Haque, Aung Min Thyke, Sujeev Shakya, Gyem Bidha, Indranil Bose, Bratindra Bhattacharya

- 7.1 Bratindra Bhattacharya, Director and Centre Head, CUTS Calcutta Resource Centre** - In his opening remarks, Mr. Bhattacharya mentioned that the South Asian region has a long history of regional integration, which has been mired by political issues. However, initiatives such as the BBIN MVA are important steps towards greater integration in the region. He further mentioned that while hard infrastructure, soft infrastructure and digital infrastructure are considered the key pillars of connectivity, livelihood has emerged as another important factor of connectivity initiatives during the course of discussion.
- 7.2 Rapporteurs' Presentation - Dr. Indranil Bose, Professor at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata and Dr. Enamul Haque, Professor, East West University, Dhaka** - Rapporteurs made a very comprehensive presentation summarising the key points of discussion and recommendations made during the conference. Some of points, which were stressed, are need for an institutional body to head BBIN, and promoting Rahmatulla Connectivity Awards for media such that they can also work on better stakeholder awareness in the BBIN border regions.

7.3 Badrul Hassan Babul, Trade Consultant (Joint Secretary), FTA Wing, Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh - Mr. Babul stated that higher economic integration is necessary to overcome the economic hurdles existing in the sub-region. For this, initiatives such as the BBIN-MVA are very important. He further mentioned that the BBIN member countries understand the significance of this and have already started implementing various connectivity strategies. For instance, in January 2018, a protocol route on passenger vehicle movement was finalised. Similarly a protocol on the cargo movements is also under process and is expected to be completed by June, 2018. He stated that once these protocol routes are finalised, it will make the implementation of the MVA smoother. His major recommendations included:

- While India has already acceded to the TIR Convention, the other three countries in the BBIN region also have accede to the TIR for better implementation of the BBIN-MVA. In this regard, he requested International Road Transport Union (IRU) to work with CUTS to convince the governments of Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan to adopt the TIR.
- The member countries should facilitate and promote usage of electronic clearance in all the borders to address corruption and law & order issues
- Establishment of economic zones in or around the border regions is necessary to address livelihood issues arising out of the MVA
- Countries should not panic at the thought of the MVA. Rather they should prioritise their problems and try to address it one by one for smoother implementation of the MVA and greater economic integrity in the region.

7.4 Gyem Bidha, Deputy Chief Laboratory Officer, Bhutan Agriculture & Food Regulatory Authority, Royal Government of Bhutan - Ms. Bidha stressed that while Bhutan is a landlocked country and connectivity is important for it, Bhutan's commitment towards preservation and conservation of culture and environment, low impact high value tourism and maintaining 60 per cent of forest cover in the country are also equally important in their policy making. She also pointed out that inadequate infrastructure, high transport cost (highest in the region), lack of border infrastructure including laboratories are some of the local challenges faced by the traders in Bhutan and these need to be immediately addressed in order to implement the MVA. Her major recommendations included:

- Increasing coordination between the neighbouring nations at all levels including at the government levels and at middle level including technical institutes, customs, etc. Better coordination at this level is very important to establish further people to people connect including labourers and porters. This will help to build trust and confidence among the local populace about each other's systems
- Strengthening institutions including testing agencies and laboratories
- Harmonisation of standards across the member countries and most importantly mutual recognition of standards between the member countries
- Finally, it is very important to create awareness among the local population, especially those staying near the borders, about the various benefits of the MVA.

7.5 Sujeev Shakya, Chairman, Nepal Economic Forum - Mr Shakya stated that the region has a huge incidence of informal trade hence it is important to understand how these informal transactions can be moved to formal ones. He suggested that

finding ways to increase maximise people-to-people contact between the member countries will be helpful for increased connectivity and coordination between the countries. Addressing the perception issue, that BBIN initiative is not only about the MVA, other aspects should also be considered; there is a need to benchmark best practices of other industries as well as other regions; and there is a need to have visible efforts in trust building among the countries for smoother people-to-people movement.

7.6 Aung Min Thyke, Director, Department of Trade, Ministry of Commerce, Myanmar - Mr. Thyke in his address suggested that for smoother implementation of the MVA, more information sharing with the local populace, especially those staying near the border is essential; member countries may vary greatly in terms of their rules and regulations, some common principles must be set to determine the rules for the BBIN-MVA; creation of equitable and sustainable employment opportunities at the border; and huge need of political will of the various governments for successful implementation of various initiatives.

The session was concluded by Mr. Bhattacharya thanking all the panellists for gracing the event and sharing their thoughts and recommendations on such an important topic. He thanked the funding agencies including Department for International Development and US State Department for extending their help to conduct studies that are significant for greater regional integration in the BBIN region. He also thanked the country partners, consultants and CUTS colleagues for successfully completing the survey and compiling the draft report. He finished his Vote of Thanks by stressing on the huge scope of the BBIN integration, of which the MVA is only a part and hoping for more such deliberations in the future for greater integration in the Bay of Bengal region.

Connectivity Imperatives in the Bay of Bengal Region

May 2-3, 2018, Hotel Metropolitan, New Delhi

Background Note

Objective

An effective public-private dialogue between and among countries of the Bay of Bengal region is essential to highlight the hurdles that must be overcome to ensure the operationalisation of one of the most talked about regional cooperation agreements in the recent times, viz. the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement. With this backdrop, the objective of this Regional Policy Dialogue is to discuss, disseminate and validate the research findings and key advocacy points that have emerged from our study in order to chart out a forward-looking action agenda for enhanced regional cooperation in the Bay of Bengal region.

Background and Context

Slow growth of trade within South Asia can be explained by the inadequate attention paid to the trade facilitation requirements, particularly for trade via land routes. Sub-optimal regional connectivity and integration further contributes to the under-utilisation of the region's economic potential. Bridging this gap between the potential and current situation will improve the economic status of the millions of inhabitants on this sub-continent, which accounts for the largest concentration of poor and marginalised population in the world. Though the countries in the region have been negotiating amongst themselves through the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) platform to reduce current physical and non-physical barriers to transportation and transit, the progress has been rather slow and the costs of intra-regional movement of goods are increasingly becoming non-competitive, notwithstanding the high potential of the emerging economies of this region.

Faced with the challenge of slow progress in integration efforts in South Asia, and a changing economic landscape, where the world seems to be increasingly turning towards South Asia and Southeast Asia to drive tomorrow's engines of growth and economic prosperity, in June 2015, the Governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal signed the Motor Vehicles Agreement to facilitate easy movement of cargo and passenger vehicles in the region, with an ultimate aim to ease and enable trade and economic flows. Implementation of this Agreement, however, faces many challenges on socio-economic, political, geographical and environmental grounds and hence positive results are yet to be realised.

Therefore, with the motive to generate momentum and discussions towards an effective operationalisation of this Agreement, CUTS, along with its country partners, conducted a study that aims to create an enabling environment and inclusive policy discourse, to facilitate trade, transport and transit connectivity between and among the BBIN group of countries and Myanmar.

The study has attempted to estimate gains from acceding to international conventions on transit facilitation; focused on identifying infrastructural, political, policy-related, and social challenges, which result in wastage of time, money, and resources; and thus, suggest possible solutions towards effective implementation of the BBIN-MVA. The study aims at highlighting gains rising from a facilitative trade regime in terms of reduced costs for local producers, greater employment opportunities for local workers, enabling the underprivileged to access new opportunities and bringing economic prosperity to all, including women, equally.

One of the major issues that poses hurdle to effective implementation of initiatives like the BBIN-MVA is that the majority of the stakeholders in the rural and remote locations of these countries lack awareness and knowledge about such enabling policies/frameworks and their positive outcomes. Some groups of stakeholders are even apprehensive about the negative consequences of the implementation of such initiatives, as they might lose their current employment, while others have positive and welcoming approach towards it.

Therefore, keeping in mind various socio-economic and political economy aspects of regional connectivity initiatives, some of the key findings from the study are as follows:

- A Working Committee should be formed with representatives from all the member countries, which can monitor and serve as a platform for discussions and amicable settlement of disputes, as well as providing guidance to the member countries on implementation of the provisions of the MVA.
- The time-cost-distance analysis concludes that the provisions under the BBIN-MVA will definitely help in reducing the trade costs among the four member countries and, additionally, country-level efforts are necessary to provide the basic hard and soft infrastructure, which can further reduce the waiting time and cost.
- Establishment of Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) along all operational border points, with all infrastructural facilities available under one roof and identification of critical nodes/locations for establishing Inland Container Depots (ICDs) where all customs procedures can be done at a single point, are some of the requirements for a smooth implementation of the BBIN-MVA. Additionally, it is important that infrastructural planning and execution is done with a gender inclusive approach.
- Development of soft infrastructure along the economic corridors is essential for easy and effortless implementation of the MVA, as it will curb many of the hassles caused by extensive involvement of middlemen.
- Building capacities, skills and alternate livelihood opportunities for ground level stakeholders will be critical to ensure political buy-in of such initiatives at the local level. Consensus needs to be built at various levels regarding the gains by enabling agreements and higher trade, with particular reference to the creation of sustainable livelihoods. In certain cases and geographies, there might be loss of livelihood in the short- and medium-term (for example, for the unskilled labourers involved in transshipment activities). It will be crucial to be prepared about such shifts in existing ecosystems of jobs and hence socio-political realities. Efforts are needed to compensate for such loss and thereby enabling a more inclusive approach towards the implementation of the BBIN-MVA and such similar connectivity initiatives.

Therefore, this Regional Policy Dialogue aims to deliberate on the research findings, share insights from various stakeholder groups and chart out specific and prioritised solutions and action agenda to further boost connectivity and regional cooperation, with particular emphasis on participation by the private sector in the process, inclusion of women, other marginalised and vulnerable communities, which will directly or indirectly get impacted.

Connectivity Imperatives in the Bay of Bengal Region

May 2-3, 2018, Hotel Metropolitan, New Delhi

Agenda

Day 1: Wednesday, May 2, 2018

1600 - 1630 Registration

1630 - 1830 Opening: Emerging Trends in Regionalism and Strategic Issues for Better Connectivity in the Bay of Bengal Region

This will be a high-level plenary with speakers sharing their insights on emerging strategic and geopolitical issues impacting connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region. This will also highlight how countries in the Bay of Bengal region are looking at regionalism at present and what priorities define their approach to the region.

- Welcome Remarks by Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International
- Introductory Remark by Jaya Singh Verma, Programme Manager Asia Regional Team, Department for International Development, British High Commission
- Introductory Remark by Robert Garverick, Minister Counsellor for Economic, Environmental, Science and Technology Affairs, US Embassy in New Delhi
- Special Address by Amitava Chakraborty, Director, Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute
- Special Address by Dasho Kinley Dorji, Former Secretary, Ministry of Information and Communication, Royal Government of Bhutan
- Special Address by Sandeep Kumar, Commissioner (Customs & Export Promotion), Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, Government of India
- Special Address by Toe Aung Myint, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Government of Myanmar
- Special Address by Purushottam Ojha, Former Commerce Secretary of Nepal
- Vote of Thanks by Prithviraj Nath, Associate Director, CUTS International

1900 - 2030 - Book Release: Putting Consumer's First - Essays in honour of Pradeep Mehta

2030 Reception & Dinner

Day 2: Thursday, May 3, 2018

0900 - 1030 Session 1: Linking Connectivity to Livelihoods

This session will deliberate on how better connectivity between and among countries in the Bay of Bengal region will impact job creation and sustainable livelihoods. It will look at evidence presented from the recent relevant studies to discuss trends and come up with recommendations for the promotion of sustainable livelihoods, with a particular focus on women's entrepreneurship.

Chair

Atiur Rahman, Chairman, Unnayan Shamannay and Former Governor, Bangladesh Bank

Presentation

Debolina Mukherjee, Policy Analyst, CUTS International

Panellists

- Mustafizur Rahman Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh
- Pushpa Chhetri, Director, Bhutan Media and Communication Institute, Bhutan
- Anasua Basu Roychoudhury, Fellow, Observer Research Foundation
- Sagar Prasai, India Country Representative, The Asia Foundation
- SwanPyae Oo, Project Manager, Myanmar Marketing Research & Development

1030 - 1100 Networking Break

1100 - 1300 Session 2: Leveraging Infrastructure for Better Physical Connectivity

This session will look at the status of existing infrastructure and the gaps, how on-going and planned infrastructure development can be leveraged for optimum outcomes from enhanced connectivity and what more needs to be done at the national and regional levels in terms of physical infrastructure, to come up with specific and prioritised infrastructure related recommendations. The session will also spend some time on how to look at infrastructure from a gender lens.

Chair

Anil Bamba, Member (Planning & Development), Land Ports Authority of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Presentation

Sarbjit Singh, Policy Analyst, CUTS International

Panellists

- Monoj Kumar Roy, Former Additional Secretary (FTA), Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh
- Karma Pemba, Chief Transport Officer, Road Safety & Transport Authority, Royal Government of Bhutan
- Joseph George, Consultant, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

- Soumya Chattopadhyay, Consultant, Regional Cooperation, Asian Development Bank
- Thet Zaw Win, Director Ministry of Construction, Government of Myanmar
- Rajan Sharma, Oriental Freight Service and Former President, Nepal Freight Forwarders Association

1300-1400 Lunch

1400 - 1530 Session 3: Software of Connectivity: The BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement and Other Initiatives

This session will focus on the current status and possible challenges to the implementation of the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement and examine how tools like the TIR Convention can enable and facilitate the implementation of such connectivity initiatives. It will also discuss the implications of a successful implementation of the BBIN MVA for other connectivity initiatives in the region.

Chair

Mustafizur Rahman Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh

Presentation

Surendar Singh, Fellow, CUTS International

Panellists

- Abdul Matlub Ahmad, President, India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce
- Md. Sanuwarul Kabir, Assistant Commissioner, National Board of Revenue, Government of Bangladesh
- Satish K. Reddy, Consultant, Asian Development Bank
- Hla Hla Yee, General Secretary, Myanmar International Freight Forwarders Association
- Rash Bihari Rauniar, Managing Director, Interstate Multimodal Transport Pvt. Ltd., Nepal

1530 - 1600 Networking Break

1600 - 1730 Session 4: Private Sector Perspectives on Leveraging Connectivity

This session will discuss the envisaged and desired outcomes of connectivity initiatives in the region as perceived by private sector players. It will collate private sector inputs on the sectors, projects and dialogues, which are to be prioritised and at what levels. The idea is to come up with a prioritised action agenda to enable the private sector to leverage various connectivity initiatives in the region.

Chair

M P Bezbaruah, Former Member, North Eastern Council, Ministry of the Development of North East Region, Government of India

Presentation

Prithviraj Nath, Associate Director, CUTS International

Panellists

- Damchae Dem, Founder, Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs
- Sudhir Chandra Nath, Head of Business, Advance Chemical Industries Ltd, Bangladesh
- Myo Thant, Managing Director, Zar & Zar Co. Ltd., Myanmar
- Kailash Bajimaya, Nepal Chamber of Commerce

1730 - 1830 Closing: Key Policy Recommendations and An Action Agenda

This session will focus on bringing together the suggestions in the form of either policy and/or practice changes or specific business/investment opportunities/ideas that emerged from all the different sessions. A compilation of the key recommendations will be presented by CUTS International followed by reflections from government officials and experts to sum-up the key takeaways from this dialogue.

Chair

Bratindra Bhattacharya, Director, CUTS International

Rapporteur's Presentation

- Indranil Bose, Professor, St. Xavier's College, Kolkata
- Enamul Haque, Professor, East West University, and Emeritus Fellow, Unnayan Shamannay, Dhaka

Speakers

- Badrul Hassan Babul, Trade Consultant (Joint Secretary), FTA Wing, Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh
- Gyem Bidha, Deputy Chief Laboratory Officer, Bhutan Agriculture & Food Regulatory Authority, Royal Government of Bhutan
- Aung Min Thyke, Director, Department of Trade, Ministry of Commerce, Myanmar
- Sujeev Shakya, Chairman, Nepal Economic Forum

List of Participants

Bangladesh	
<p>Amitava Chakraborty Director Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute Dhaka, Bangladesh</p> <p>Atiur Rahman Former Governor, Bangladesh Bank & Honorary Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh</p> <p>Mustafizur Rahman Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka - Bangladesh</p> <p>Monoj Kumar Roy Former Additional Secretary (FTA) Ministry of Commerce, Government of Bangladesh</p> <p>Abdul Matlub Ahmad President, India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Chairman, Nitol Motors Limited, Dhaka, Bangladesh</p>	<p>Sudhir Chandra Nath Head of Business ACI Ltd, Dhaka, Bangladesh</p> <p>A K Enamul Haque Professor, East West University Dhaka, Bangladesh</p> <p>Md. Badrul Hassan Babul Trade Consultant (Joint Secretary) FTA Wing. Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh</p> <p>Md. Sanuwarul Kabir Assistant Commissioner, National Board of Revenue, Government of Bangladesh</p> <p>Shaheen ul Alam Project Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay, Dhaka, Bangladesh</p> <p>Md. Mahabub Hasan Senior Research Associate Unnayan Shamannay, Dhaka, Bangladesh</p>
Bhutan	
<p>Shiva Raj Chhetri Programme Coordinator Bhutan Media and Communications Institute Bhutan</p> <p>Tshering Dorji Reporter Kuensel Corporation (Newspaper) Bhutan</p> <p>Sonam Tashi Editor The Journalist Newspaper, Bhutan</p> <p>Khampa CEO, Wedia Bhutan</p>	<p>Dasho Kinley Dorji Former Secretary Ministry of Information & Communications Royal Government of Bhutan</p> <p>Pushpa Chhetri Director Bhutan Media and Communications Institute Bhutan</p> <p>Karma Pemba Chief Transport Officer Road Safety & Transport Authority Royal Government of Bhutan</p>

<p>Gopilal Acharya Freelancer/Researcher Bhutan</p> <p>Siok Sian Pek Dorji Executive Director Bhutan Center for Media & Democracy, Bhutan</p>	<p>Damchae Dem Founder/CEO, Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs, Bhutan</p> <p>Gyem Bidha Deputy Chief Laboratory Officer Bhutan Agriculture & Food Regulatory Authority Royal Government of Bhutan</p>
India	
<p>Anusua Basu Roy Choudhury Fellow Observer Research Foundation, Kolkata</p> <p>Sagar Prasai Country Representative The Asia Foundation</p> <p>Anil K Bamba Member (Planning & Development) Land Ports Authority of India Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India</p> <p>Joseph George Consultant UNESCAP</p> <p>Soumya Chattopadhyay Consultant, Regional Cooperation Asian Development Bank</p> <p>Sathish Reddy Regional Cooperation Specialist Asian Development Bank</p> <p>M P Bezbaruah Former Member, North Eastern Council Ministry of the Development of North- East Region</p> <p>Sangeeta Negi Deputy Director National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories</p> <p>Nahid Rashid Bangladesh High Commission New Delhi, India</p>	<p>Robert Garverick Minister Counselor for Economic, Environment, Science and Technology Affairs, Embassy of the United States of America</p> <p>Jaya Singh Verma Programme Manager - Asia Regional Team Department for International Development British High Commission</p> <p>Supratim Chatterjee Trade Specialist Embassy of the United States of America, America Embassy</p> <p>Caroline Mills South Asia Development Australian High Commission</p> <p>Esther Ewagata Assistant Director Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Australian High Commission</p> <p>Simrat Labana Project Management Specialist (Agriculture) Food Security Office U. S. Agency for International Development, American Embassy</p> <p>Brian Brendel Trade & Technology Officer Economic, Environment , Science & Technology Affairs Embassy of the United States Of America</p>

<p>Anjali Taneja Deputy Director Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry</p> <p>Shubhojeet Chakravarty Senior Manager GUIDe-Infrastructure Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu India LLP</p> <p>Gareth Price Senior Research Fellow Asia-Pacific Programme Chatham House London</p> <p>Sabyasachi Dutta Founder / Director Asian Confluence, Shillong</p> <p>Rupa Chanda Faculty IIM Bangalore, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India</p> <p>Shivani Wadehra The Energy and Resources Institute</p>	<p>Chek Zhiyong Matthew First Secretary (Political) High Commission of the Republic of Singapore</p> <p>Pankaj Vashisht Senior Fellow Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations</p> <p>Subir Bhowmick South Asia Correspondent and Senior Editor BD News 24 Kolkata Kolkata, India</p> <p>M L Debnath President Tripura Chamber of Commerce</p> <p>Biswajit Das General Secretary Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of North Bengal (FOCIN), Siliguri, West Bengal,</p>
Myanmar	
<p>Toe Aung Myint Permanent Secretary Ministry of Commerce, Government of Myanmar</p> <p>Swan Pyae Oo Project Manager - Business Insights Department Myanmar Marketing Research & Development Ltd</p> <p>Thet Zaw Win Director, Department of Highways Ministry of Construction Government of Myanmar</p> <p>Hla Hla Yee General Secretary Myanmar International Freight Forwarders Association , Myanmar</p>	<p>Myo Thant Managing Director Zar & Zar Co. Ltd Yangon, Myanmar</p> <p>Ye Htut Naing Director - Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Commerce, Myanmar</p> <p>Aye Aye Hla Consultant, Ministry of Transportation and Communication The Republic of the Union of Myanmar</p> <p>Khin Lin Deputy Director Ministry of Transportation and Communication The Republic of the Union of Myanmar</p>

<p>Aung Min Thyke Director - Department of Trade Ministry of Commerce Government of Myanmar</p> <p>Myint Lwin Deputy Director General Department of Consumer Affairs Ministry of Commerce</p>	<p>Aung Shin Myanmar Times Editor Myanmar</p> <p>Aung Myint Than Project Coordinator MMRD Co. Ltd.</p>
Nepal	
<p>Kailash Bajimaya CEO, Nepal Chamber of Commerce Kathmandu, Nepal</p> <p>Purushottam Ojha Former Secretary Minister of Commerce, Government of Nepal</p> <p>Rajan Sharma Oriental Freight service & Former President, Nepal Freight Forwarders Association, Nepal</p> <p>Raju Tuladhar Nepal Economic Forum Nepal</p> <p>Sujeev Shakya Chairman - Nepal Economic Forum Kathmandu, Nepal</p>	<p>R.B Rauniar Managing Director - Interstate Multimodal Transport Pvt. Ltd, Kathmandu, Nepal</p> <p>Madan Lamsal New Business Age Kathmandu, Nepal</p> <p>Asha Thapaliya Annapurna Post Kathmandu, Nepal</p> <p>Niraj KC Nepal Economic Forum</p> <p>Kshitiz Dahal Research Officer SAWTEE</p>
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<p>Prithviraj Nath Associate Director, CUTS</p> <p>Surendar Singh Fellow, CUTS</p> <p>Bratindra Bhattacherya Director, CUTS</p> <p>Indranil Bose Consultant, CUTS International & Professor, St. Xavier's College Kolkata, India</p>	<p>Sumanta Biswas Senior Programme Officer, CUTS</p> <p>Taramani Agarwal Senior Programme Officer, CUTS</p> <p>Arundhuti Biswas Programme Associate, CUTS</p> <p>Sarbjit Singh Policy Analyst, CUTS</p> <p>Debolina Mukherjee Policy Analyst, CUTS</p>