

Indo-Bangla Trade: Focus on the North East Stakeholder Consultation

Day and Date: Sunday, August 9, 2009
Venue: Hotel Rajdhani, Agartala

Backgrounder

Objectives

- To elicit the views of stakeholders in North Eastern India, especially Tripura, and Bangladesh about potential for trade, connectivity and investment involving these two regions
- To involve business representatives, civil society representatives, and government in creating awareness and momentum towards economic cooperation between North Eastern India, especially Tripura, and Bangladesh

Background

North Eastern India and Bangladesh are not only neighbours but exhibit complementary geographical and economic characteristics. This is especially true of Tripura which shares a long border with Bangladesh on its western and southern side and exhibits many cultural similarities. These characteristics might be used for evolving developmental synergies between these regions which till date remain almost completely unexploited. Some work towards this end has already been undertaken with the constitution of a *Joint Task Force on Trade and Investment* involving Tripura and Bangladesh, which has already met a few times.

Bangladesh almost separates the rest of India from the North East with only a tiny strip of area called the *chicken's neck* connecting the North East with the rest of India. Any cargo travelling from the rest of India to the North East has to travel parallel to the Bangladesh border and enter the North East through the chicken's neck.

A considerable economy in transport costs will be generated if such cargo can make its way through Bangladesh. This will also facilitate greater economic access for India to its Eastern neighbours such as Burma and Thailand. A gateway for goods from the North East to the rest of the world can also be provided by the Chittagong port which is much closer to cities such as Agartala and Shillong than the Kolkata port. The benefits from such access for the Indian economy will be huge. There is an immense opportunity for Bangladesh to emerge as a major *entrepot* economy in this regard.

Other forms of cooperation are possible. Bangladeshi entrepreneurs can undertake foreign direct investment in Tripura and generate gains for both the Bangladeshi and the Tripura economy. This can accelerate industrialisation in the Tripura region. There is also a scope for exports of power, generated from natural gas, from Tripura to power hungry, industrialising Bangladesh.

The Event

The tone of the event will be set by a series of opening remarks by dignitaries connected to this issue. This will be followed by thematic presentations on the basis of which discussions among all those assembled will take place. To conclude, a panel discussion will be organised to finalise recommendations, which will be taken forward to various levels, including the national governments of India and Bangladesh and the state governments of Tripura and other states in the North East. The agenda for the event is attached.

Proposed Agenda*

- 1145-1200 **Registration**
- 1200-1330 **Introductory Session**
Welcome Speech: Siddhartha Mitra, Head, CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics and Environment (CUTS CITEE)
Speech by Chief Guest: Manik Sarkar, Honorable Chief Minister, Tripura
Brief Remarks by distinguished delegates
Farooq Sobhan, President, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute
Matlub Ahmad, President, Indo Bangla Chamber of Commerce
M.L Debnath, President, Tripura Chamber of Commerce
Anil Saraf, Director, Federation of Industries & Commerce of North Eastern Region (FINER)
- 1330-1430 **LUNCH**
- 1430-1545 **Regional cooperation between Bangladesh and North Eastern India, especially Tripura: Trade, Connectivity and Investment**
Chair: Farooq Sobhan, President, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute
Speaker: Siddhartha Mitra, Head, CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics and Environment (CUTS CITEE)
Discussants:
Selima Ahmad, President, Bangladesh Women’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Sanjib Dev, Chief of Bureau, NE Bangla, Agartala
- Open House Discussion**
- 1545-1700 **Connectivity between Bangladesh and North East: The relative merits of transit and transshipment**
Chair: Anil Saraf, Director, Federation of Industries & Commerce of North Eastern Region (FINER)
Speaker: M. Rahmatullah, Transport Policy Advisor, Bangladesh Planning Commission
Discussants:
Matlub Ahmad, President, Indo-Bangla Chamber of Commerce
Jayanta Bhattacharya, Press Trust of India
Biswendu Bhattacharjee, United News of India
- Open House Discussion**
- 1700-1715 **Tea / Coffee Break**
- 1715-1830 **Panel Discussion: The Way Forward for Regional Cooperation between North Eastern India, especially Tripura and the North East**
Moderator: Siddhartha Mitra, Head, CUTS CITEE
Panelists:
Farooq Sobhan, President, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute
Matlub Ahmad, President, Indo Bangla Chamber of Commerce
Jitendra Chowdhury, Hon’ble Commerce Minister, Tripura
M. Yunus, Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies
- 2000-2230 **Dinner**

* *Speakers to be confirmed*