

BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement will be a game-changer for regional cooperation: CUTS

“The Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicles Agreement will be a game-changer for regional cooperation in South Asia and that requires a number of enablers for its effective implementation,” said Bipul Chatterjee, Executive, CUTS International. He was speaking at a National Policy Dialogue on “Enabling and Inclusive Policy and Political Economy Discourse for Trade, Transport and Transit Facilitation in and among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar and Nepal – Facilitating Implementation and Stakeholder Buy-in in the Bay of Bengal Region”, which was held in New Delhi on 27th February, 2018.



With support from the UK’s Department for International Development and the US State Department, CUTS International is implementing this multi-country, multi-year project, looking at local level infrastructure needs and development implications of trade, transport and transit connectivity between and among these countries, with a focus on possible implementation challenges to the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement (BBIN MVA).

The meeting highlighted a number of significant initiatives contributing towards better connectivity and seamless movement of people and cargo. It emphasised on ensuring better connectivity by addressing bottlenecks in physical infrastructure and procedural barriers, generating political consensus for connectivity initiatives, and why they should be looked at from gender and other dimensions of social inclusiveness for a better local buy-in.

Delivering a special address on the occasion, Sandeep Kumar, Commissioner (Customs & Export Promotion), Central Board of Excise & Customs, Government of India, stressed that with the help of the Electronic Cargo Tracking System and a better conformity assessment system, which are in place in India, the BBIN MVA will become a successful model for regional cooperation. He also spoke about other important initiatives such as rail connectivity for people-to-people contacts between India and Bangladesh, development of Border Haats, which will foster better bilateral as well as regional cooperation.

Prithviraj Nath, Associate Director of CUTS presented the key findings of the study, which are based on the perceptions of the relevant stakeholders regarding possible implementation challenges of the BBIN MVA. He stressed on the fact that along with the soft and hard infrastructural bottlenecks, political nuances also pose challenges towards the implementation of the BBIN MVA. He suggested a model of better local buy-in to address these issues by highlighting their gains that can reaped through this Agreement and other related initiatives.

According to Duncan Overfield, Senior Regional Economic Adviser and Deputy Head, Asia Regional Team of the UK's Department for International Development, the success of the BBIN MVA and other such initiatives will depend on the level of private sector engagement and the strength of institutional arrangements for regional cooperation such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation can play a vital role. Chad Norberg, Trade and Technology Unit Chief at the US Embassy in New Delhi emphasised that the implementation of the World Trade Organisation's Trade Facilitation Agreement will help these countries to better implement the BBIN MVA and other connectivity initiatives.

Mandakini Kaul, Senior Regional Cooperation Officer (South Asia) of the World Bank, underscored the importance of women's participation in economic activities for comprehensive and socially inclusive development. She stressed on identifying issues in trade regime that affect both men and women and also those issues which are only faced by women, thus, finding solutions to them, resulting in successful of women participation in cross-border trade.

Sandeep Raj Jain, Economic Affairs Officer of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, stressed on prioritising and developing those corridors and critical hubs that are of geographic and strategic importance to the region. A D James, Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, Government of India underlined the importance of local level capacity building, among others, for an effective implementation of the BBIN MVA.

Hardeep Batra, Additional Commissioner, WCO (World Customs Organisation) Cell in the Central Board of Excise & Customs underlined the importance of the Revised Kyoto Convention on trade facilitation and the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and how the implementation of various provisions of these agreements will help overcoming procedural challenges to "trading across borders".

The BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement was signed in June 2016 and the protocols for seamless movement of both passenger and cargo vehicles are being developed. While Bhutan is yet to

ratify it and expected to do so later this year, in a meeting held in Bengaluru last month the other three countries have finalised and initialled the protocols for the movement of passenger vehicles. Those for the movement of cargo vehicles have also been drafted and will be finalised after a few more rounds of trial runs. The implementation of the Agreement is expected to begin in the second half of this year.

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