

BANGLADESH-BHUTAN-INDIA-NEPAL

DOSSIER OF CATALYTIC MULTIMODAL CONNECTIVITY INITIATIVES



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BANGLADESH

Opportunities for India-Bangladesh ties at the state level

The Government of India should encourage and assist the North-eastern states in taking advantage of their [proximity to Bangladesh](#) to change itself from a landlocked to a land-linked region. The Northeast needs to establish a plan for these states' paradiplomacy efforts and regularly engage with Bangladeshi authorities and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

CUTS Comments

Impact on Multi-modal Connectivity

Establishment of the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Guwahati, Assam, coupled with establishing a ['States Division'](#) in the MEA, the Government of India has renewed paradiplomacy efforts of India's North-eastern states with Bangladesh. With the cooperation from the MEA and other North-eastern states, this region can push for better rail, air, road, and water connectivity with Bangladesh. Hence, transformed itself from a landlocked region into a land-linked region.

Impact on BBIN Sub-region

The proximity of Northeast India with Bangladesh facilitates the paradiplomacy efforts of the North-eastern states. Bangladesh's Prime Minister's commitment to promoting seamless connectivity and [opening ports of Chattogram and Mangla](#) for the shipment of products from India would increase the trade in the sub-region for products, such as organic food, silk, crude oil, and fisheries. These paradiplomacy efforts will enhance connectivity, trade, and welfare gains for people in the sub-region.

Food for Thought

The paradiplomacy efforts between Northeast India and Bangladesh have gained traction. However, apart from exploring new areas of cooperation between Northeast India and Bangladesh, priority should be given to utilising innate proximity through multi-modal connectivity and transforming physical connectivity into business ventures and development tools.

BHUTAN

Bangladesh confirms Bandwidth to Bhutan for the third Internet Gateway

The decision of [providing internet bandwidth and connectivity](#) through Bangladesh territory at an exceptional rate is an outcome of the Prime Minister's meeting between Bangladesh and Bhutan on March 24, 2021. The deal offered by Bangladesh will come into effect once an MoU is signed between competent authorities in Bhutan and Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Ltd. (BSCCL).

CUTS Comments

Impact on Multi-modal Connectivity

The Third International Internet Gateway is [vital for securing a backup connection](#) for Bhutan during natural catastrophes. The increased connectivity and bandwidth would enable Bhutan's IT industry to develop better data infrastructure, leading to a seamless flow of data and information.

Altogether, this would contribute to trade and multi-modal connectivity in the region. Better data infrastructure will provide traceability through improved shipment visibility and enhance the safety and security of the cargo.

Impact on BBIN Sub-region

The low cost of internet connectivity in the country would ensure easy accessibility of the internet in rural areas. It would increase data availability and accessibility in the sub-region and open new trade, commerce, and investment avenues.

Furthermore, a seamless flow of data and information would facilitate trade in the sub-region by enabling investment in digital infrastructures. These include Single Window systems, Automated Customs Processing systems, Risk Management systems, Electronic Cargo Tracking systems, etc.

Food for Thought

Improved internet connectivity and bandwidth would boost Bhutan's IT industry. Apart from ensuring physical connectivity, digital connectivity is vital to facilitate the growing logistics requirement of the sub-region. The increase in usage of digital connectivity infrastructure is expected to give rise to new products, services and applications that can potentially transform how people live and work.

INDIA

India to enhance cooperation in connectivity and energy sectors with neighbours

India will soon be connected through [six rail links with Bangladesh and two rail links with Nepal](#). In the last few years, India has increasingly pushed for enhancing close cooperation in developing infrastructure in its neighbourhood. Multi-modal transport has steadily improved connectivity with and within parts of India's neighbourhood.

CUTS Comments

Impact on Multi-modal connectivity

The new railway links announced by the Indian government with Bangladesh and Nepal are vital for [shrinking the geographical distance](#) between these nations. These rail tracks will help strengthen rail infrastructure in the sub-region.

Furthermore, developing railway links would lead to the development of last-mile connectivity through multi-modal measures. It will facilitate people and goods movement, build linkages of roadways to various railway junctions, and promote seamless connectivity.

Impact on BBIN Sub-region

The new railway linkages between the three countries would [enhance connectivity and engagement](#) in the sub-region. Through enhanced cooperation among India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, implementing infrastructural projects in the sub-region would be expedited.

Additionally, new railway linkages would increase intra- and inter-regional trade in the sub-region while reducing the cost and time of cargo movement. Also, it will bring economic development to the sub-region.

Food for Thought

A good rail network would bring about significant bilateral and international trade changes. Moreover, improved connectivity means greater people-to-people contact and more considerable goodwill. However, any such development initiatives in the sub-region should also consider people on the ground and hear their concerns and demands with due priority. A proactive approach to augmenting cooperation within the sub-region is required for more significant capacity-building and effective implementation of projects.

NEPAL

Nepal, India, Bangladesh 'agree' to open transport routes

A meeting of three countries on the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) on March 7-8 in New Delhi, where Bhutan participated as an observer, decided to proceed with the plan to operate the [Kakarvitta- Kolkata-Dhaka or Biratnagar-Kolkata](#) or both the routes in the next six months. The meeting was held to discuss the Passenger and Cargo Protocols essential for implementing the BBIN MVA to regulate passenger, personal and vehicular cargo traffic between the four countries signed in June 2015.

CUTS Comments

Impact on Multi-modal connectivity

The plan to operate the Kakarvitta- Kolkata-Dhaka or Biratnagar-Kolkata or both routes will be the first step for commencing the [BBIN MVA](#). The new transport routes will promote seamless connectivity and reduce time and cost between the agreed countries (Bangladesh, India, and Nepal). It will further ease cross-border transportation in the sub-region and unlock its growth potential.

Impact on BBIN Sub-region

The opening of new routes will promote regional supply chains and lead to better transport linkages within the sub-region as they are largely based on road and rail transportation. This will further ease the market access and movement of goods and passengers. Moreover, [improved transport connectivity](#) promotes trade facilitation and boosts intra-regional and inter-regional trade.

Food for Thought

One of the critical elements involved in the flourishing of any region is connectivity with the nearby trade and commercial hubs. The new transport routes will promote trade and connectivity and livelihood opportunities and address people's livelihood concerns. However, it is vital to sustaining the new transport and connectivity routes through better infrastructure development.

