



Enabling a Political Economy  
Discourse for Multimodal  
Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region  
(M-Connect)



Multimodal Connectivity  
in the BBIN Subregion

March 02, 2023  
India International Centre, New Delhi

# Event Report



with the support of



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# Executive Summary

## What was discussed?

CUTS International, with support from the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is implementing the project entitled enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multimodal Connectivity in the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Subregion ([M-Connect](#)) in partnership with Unnayan Shamannay (Bangladesh), Bodhi Media and Communications Institute (Bhutan), and Nepal Economic Forum.

CUTS organized a regional meeting in New Delhi on Thursday, March 02, 2023 that sought to deliberate on and disseminate the project’s findings among the key stakeholders, particularly policy-makers, with the aim of paving the way for achieving positive impacts in respect to both “ease of doing business” and “ease of living” through necessary project, policy, process and delivery interventions for not only making the subregion better integrated in terms of having functional transport corridors but also transforming them to economic corridors.

## Why was it discussed?

Seamless transport and transit connectivity among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) subregion can be a catalyst for greater intra-and inter-regional trade. This connectivity needs to encompass all modes of transportation, viz. roadways, railways, waterways and airways, including their alignments with each other. This is particularly true in the context of achieving resilience and robustness of post-covid economic recovery.

## Key observations

1. Multimodal connectivity and transport are indispensable facets for facilitation of trade and investment. Interpreting BBIN subregion as an *economic corridor*, instead of a narrow transport corridor, is a more holistic approach to attain multimodal connectivity.
2. The economies of the BBIN subregion all stands to gain from improved connectivity. Through the United Kingdom (UK) - India collaboration, the UK will be helping India identify barriers and will provide *support for infrastructure development*. The UK and India remains deeply committed to achieving the goal of limiting global warming.
3. Despite geographical and cultural linkages between the BBIN subregion, the region remains deeply disconnected. There is a need for focusing and achieving *inclusive economic growth* and subsequently, *address gender inequality* in trade.
4. Policy makers and other stakeholders have to be *cautious of political sensitivities*, where countries will have to carve out dispensations, and India will have to be accommodative.
5. Challenges faced during implementation of large infrastructure projects in the Northeast Region are due to *lack of coordination across agencies*, land acquisition, and slope protection measure.
6. The incompatibility among BBIN countries regarding *variable working days and hours* also act as a barrier to connectivity.
7. Operationalisation and *reinvigoration of land ports* is the top priority for the Government of India. These land ports are real drivers for boosting trade in the subregion.
8. The Asian Development Bank is conducting the South Asia Sub Region Economic Program (SASEC) programme, under which SASEC corridors have been developed in pursuit of *identifying investment opportunities* in the region.
9. Customs modernisation & harmonisation, and their incorporation into *single window system* is essential for seamless movement of goods and services.
10. The Electronic Cargo Tracking System in the BBIN region would be innovative in terms of *digitising connectivity*.

## Opening

The opening session deliberated upon the importance of multimodal connectivity in the BBIN subregion and highlighted challenges and opportunities therein.

The welcome remarks were delivered by **Mr. Bipul Chatterjee**, *Executive Director, CUTS International*. This was followed by the opening remarks delivered by **Mr. Didar Singh**, *former Secretary of Overseas Affairs, Government of India*, **Mr. Kuancheng Huang**, *Professor, Department of Transportation and Logistics Management, National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Taiwan*, and **Mrs. Sutapa Choudhary**, *Deputy head Indo-Pacific Regional Department, India, and Indian Ocean Directorate, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, United Kingdom, New Delhi*. A keynote address was delivered by **Mr. Gopal Krishna**, *former Secretary of Shipping, Government of India*.

**Mr Chatterjee** at the very onset of his welcome remarks clarified as to what this meeting is not about. He, in clear terms, acknowledged the fact that this regional meeting was not about the Motor Vehicles Agreement signed in June 2015. He drew attention to the draft protocols for the movement of passenger personnel and cargo vehicles. CUTS International has looked at not only road transport in the region but also multimodal connectivity prospects in this subregion, considering the multimodal connectivity plan that Asian Development Bank (ADB) has prepared.

Therefore, the final meeting was about how BBIN countries and other stakeholders can operationalize the existing connectivity by looking at the gaps which are to be filled out. Various agencies including ADB, the World Bank and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) are very much committed to this cause.

The speakers in the opening session made crucial arguments regarding the agenda at hand. Attention was drawn towards understanding the political economy angle. Mr. Singh believes that lack of political economy backing has been a major reason as to why we find that the BBIN region or the SAARC region has not really progressed economically.

There is a need to generate awareness that the economies of the countries involved are dependent on political support from their respective governments. If the support of the political economy is adequately sought, multimodal connectivity will act as a precursor to the trade agreements that will come about and the trade linkages that already exist.

**Prof. Huang** drew attention to the importance of seamless transportation and the strengthening of connectivity initiatives across South Asia. It is crucial to identify the infrastructure gaps that hinder such moves. He highlighted the importance of a pilot study for cross border infrastructure investment and trade facilitation policies.

**Dr. Choudhury** emphasizes on the need to study and unlock some of the political economy challenges that impede the strengthening of connectivity in the South Asia region. It is inexplicable that India's trade with Bangladesh is only one per cent of her foreign trade, while it is 10 per cent of Bangladesh's trade with India, despite the fact that these two countries are the most important trading partners in South Asian inter-regional trade.

She stressed the need for inclusive economic growth and for addressing gender inequality in trade. Infrastructural investments will be in vain if climate change is not kept in focus. She harps on meaningful collaborations and opportunities in the region, and highlights that dividends from the Motor Vehicles Act, 2015 (MVA) are yet to be reaped.

The discussion was meaningfully accelerated with the keynote address. **Mr. Krishna** defined the problem adequately and succinctly. We in South Asia - BBIN - are not well connected. The problem lies in the whole structure of our transport system. It is important to keep in mind the sensitivities of particular countries. Countries will have to carve out dispensations and India will have to be accommodative.

Sustainability should be prioritized in the inland waterway region. He referred to the need to build transport systems and waterways that were in vague existence through history like the Ganga-Meghna-Brahmaputra waterways. It is time to rethink and redesign investment strategies. The session concluded with an emphasis on local sensitivities and addressing concerns pertaining to the livelihood of people.

## Recent Initiatives on BBIN Connectivity

This session highlighted the sector-specific policy and infrastructure developments undertaken by the BBIN governments to promote multimodal connectivity. It deliberated upon good policies, processes and deliveries to address connectivity challenges.

The panel saw eminent personalities, including **Mrs. Neelima Akhter**, *Additional Secretary, Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges, Bangladesh*, **Mrs. Pushpa Chhetri**, *Director, Bodhi Media and Communications Institute, Bhutan*, **Mr. Sanjeev Gupta**, *Member (Planning and Development), Land Ports Authority of India, Government of India*, and **Mr. Rabi Shanker Sainju**, *Senior Fellow, Institute of Integrated Development Studies, Former Joint Secretary, Ministry of Industry, Commerce & Supplies, Government of Nepal*. The session was moderated by Mr. Indranil Bose, *Consultant, CUTS International*.

**Ms. Akhter** stressed on the need for capacity building of stakeholders involved in the process of trade and initiatives for integration. Several connectivity initiatives were referred with particular attention to regional transport and railway networks. The volume of business is on the rise and Bangladesh is keen to strengthen her ties with trading partners in the world and in the region through economic diplomacy and trade facilitation measures.

She acknowledged the importance of multimodal connectivity for the Government of Bangladesh. The present political dispensation aspires to make Bangladesh a transportation hub in the region. Ports like Mongla are being refurbished to enhance trade connectivity in the region. She drew the panel's attention to several projects, one of them being the Ashuganj-Akhaura corridors between India and Bangladesh. Private sector linkages - their exploration and subsequent utilization- were brought to the forefront in this session. It is a common expectation that these would precipitate a win-win situation for all stakeholders involved, while at the same time creates livelihood opportunities.

**Ms. Chetri** recognized several initiatives that have been taken up in the direction of strengthening multimodal connectivity. Transformation is the new mantra with a special focus on air connectivity. She told the gathering that Gelephu and Kokrajhar are being connected through railways. The ADB is presently beefing up the road transport systems through careful plans for review and maintenance. Dry ports are being constructed. Gelephu will also have access to Jogigopa riverine port in Assam for a multimodal hub connection.

She is very sure of the fact that livelihoods of several segments stand to be addressed through improvement in trade. She emphasized on the importance of considering increasing usage of waterways for Bhutan's keenness to keep environmental concerns.

Transport is an enabler for sustainable development and has to decarbonize over time. She stressed on timely completion of infrastructure projects. Facilitation of women's participation is also an important facet of concern alongside raising awareness among various sections of stakeholders. She calls upon governments to commit themselves to the development of economic corridors.

**Mr. Sainju** noted that Nepal is prioritizing intra-regional trade as one of her focal points. Several road projects are underway along with upgrading of highways from two to four lanes and these could potentially be completed within the next 5 years. Adding on, he noted how railway lines are under construction and passenger movement has also been expanded. Seamless movement of cargo is expected through construction of railway lines.

Construction of ICPs, ICDs and dry ports will boost the volume of trade between Nepal and other countries in the region. Kosi, Gandak and Karnali rivers are also being considered as important waterways that can make multimodal connectivity a reality in the region. Nepal, a landlocked country, is using two Indian ports, namely Kolkata and Vizag for its international trade. Seamless movement of cargo and passengers as prioritised by the BBIN-MVA is something Nepal is looking forward to, for increasing Nepalese and intra-regional trade.

A lot remains to be put in place but there is no reason to be pessimistic in the words of Mr. Sainju. Congestion and transaction costs at the border shall be reduced substantially in the event of improved connectivity. Nepal is, therefore, trying to boost several economic corridors. Supply chain management systems will also be better advanced through such connectivity endeavours.

**Mr. Gupta** talked about operationalisation and reinvigoration of land ports. It is a top priority for the Government of India and is indeed a real driver for boosting trade in the subregion. Adequate attention was drawn to the importance of establishing compatibility and complementarity with regard to sensitivities and infrastructural facilities on both sides of the border.



He apprised on approval of 14 new land ports by the Government of India. Out of which, five are under-construction land ports, four in process of land acquisition and five are planned land ports. Banbasa to Panitanki- the East-West railway corridor is underway. Counterpart land in Banbasa is yet to be acquired while Rupaidiha is 90% ready. Although this is one side of the reality, the other side of the coin shows that trade is low in the region.

The remaining 11 land ports are yet to be constructed as land acquisition is yet to take place. The approach to the same is politically sensitized and the government is approaching politically friendly States first. Mr. Gupta adequately explained the process of land acquisition, line of reporting, approval etc. He says that in the next 3 to 4 years, the Government of India hopes for all 23 land ports to be in operation.

His focal point was the importance of land port Petrapole. There is an urgent need for upgrade of land custom stations that is needed in the context of land ports. Despite having land ports in Myanmar and Nepal, trade is nearly nil in the region. He drew attention to the difficulties in making land ports, wherein at least 100 acres of land is needed. He concluded by attending to the need for a digital transformation including improved security initiatives and non-intrusive scanners.

The session came to a close with concluding remarks from **Mr. Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty**, *Former IFS, Government of India*. He highlighted the fact that ultimately it is the economic and trade issues that would drive the relationship in the BBIN region, apart from other aspects such as border management, and so on and so forth. He talked about management of containers, and called for adequate funding to the country concerned to ensure adequate management of the same.

## Political Economy Challenges to Multimodal Connectivity

In the second session, insights from a perception survey, titled ‘Enabling Transport Connectivity in the BBIN subregion: Stakeholder’s Perception and Way Forward’ was presented. By looking at existing political economy challenges, it saw deliberation upon specific recommendations for enabling a better-informed political economy discourse including their gender and social implication aspects.

The session presentation was presented by **Mr. Indranil Bose**, *Consultant, CUTS International*. The panellists for this session were Mr. **Bhimlal Suberi**, *Former Chief, Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of Information and Communication, Royal Government of Bhutan*, **Ms. Riya Sinha**, *Associate Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress, New Delhi*, and **Mrs. Apekshya Shah**, *Senior Fellow, Nepal Economic Fellow*. This session was moderated by **Mr. Mustafizur Rahman**, *Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh*.

The session commenced with welcome remarks from Mr. Rahman, flagging the need for connectivity and integration in the BBIN subregion. He drew attention to the fact that nothing much was on the ground because of various political economy challenges and that necessitated a deeper understanding of the ground realities. It is only by addressing such challenges that one can take forward the mission of a more robust intra-regional trade regime in Eastern South Asia.

Presenting the political economy challenges, **Mr. Bose** put forth the various challenges as they transpired across the various corridors, through the perception survey undertaken by the CUTS research team. He highlighted the importance of studying the advantages and disadvantages of different modes of transport.

The various corridors included linkages from New Delhi, Dhubri-Jogighopa-Guwahati landscape, linkages to and from Bihar, Kolkata-Haldia-Kolaghat triangle, Karimganj (a strategic location for India-Bangladesh trade), the Siliguri corridor, and others.

The field visits threw up various granular details which could serve as vital inputs for policymakers in respect of multimodal connectivity. These include:

- Information gaps at various level
- Inadequate representation of women
- Need to products and specialities
- Infrastructure development in respect of both hard and soft facets including narrow and congested roads, internet unavailability, and obsolete equipment
- Ignorance to voices from the ground level, and therefore need for more stakeholder consultation
- Being futuristic in assessing roadways and railways and project a long term view including connectivity with surrounding commercial areas
- Need for amicable solutions to problems regarding land acquisition
- Sensitivity to environmental concern and degradation
- Need to ensure better coordination and communication between and among various agencies and stakeholders
- Addressing livelihood concerns of people
- Need to diffuse unhealthy practices like extortions

Hence, there is a need to consider the possibility of inclusive development that would address the concerns of stakeholder and makes the voices of local and grassroots stakeholders echo in the halls of policy making.

**Mr. Suberi** raised the issue of land space availability, and called for support from countries and other stakeholders in the BBIN subregion. He talks about the planned investment for three river ports, and how they are going to be extremely beneficial for traders. Adequate attention was drawn to complaints raised by transporters relating to bribes or extortion.

He also drew attention to the asymmetry with regard to infrastructure on the two sides of the border, particularly concerning congestion of border areas, waiting time at the border - all of which stand in the way of speedy clearance of cargo. He also stressed the need for sensitivities regarding political issues. Finally, he brought the issue of BIMSTEC transport, for synergy with the greater pan-Asian connectivity.

*Ms. Sinha* reiterated the need to capture granular details and the need to look at the human side for a bottom-up approach to connectivity. She suggested the policy interventions that need to be put in place to overcome these challenges. Since trade connectivity can have a spill over effect on tourism or education connectivity as well, she emphasized policy interventions at three levels:

- First, subregional or supranational level where talks among national governments are already in progress,
- Second, national level where she stressed the need for coordination between agencies and departments of governments, like for example the roadways and the electricity department, in the absence of which connectivity initiatives will always be frustrated
- And third, stakeholder consultation for addressing local needs; for example women's concerns need to be heard for greater women empowerment in trade, and all this clearly points to the need for capacity building on various levels.

*Ms. Shah* departs from these areas of concern, and widens our spectrum. She harps on the fact that landlocked countries should be looked upon as land-linked countries and opportunities for enhancing connectivity should be used to the fullest. Recently, India and Nepal have moved ahead in respect of bilateral trade of electricity and also allowing Nepal to export electricity to Bangladesh. This is definitely a win for the BBIN initiative.

She reiterated the need to consult stakeholders so that those disadvantaged as a result of connectivity initiatives have a way out of their difficulties. Many fear loss of jobs in the event of seamless connectivity among the countries. Thus, governance of the concerned countries would have to consider what alternate livelihood opportunities can be extended to them. Timely dissemination of information is vital to all connectivity initiatives. Once again, the need for inclusive development was highlighted.

## **Future Connectivity and Trade Opportunities in the BBIN Subregion**

The third session focussed on the emerging investment opportunities in the field of multimodal connectivity in the BBIN subregion. It deliberated upon the initiatives undertaken by various bilateral and multilateral agencies tuned to governmental priorities in the infrastructure structure.

The panellists for this session included **Ms. Mitali Nikore**, *Transport Specialist, The World Bank Group*, **Mr. Taniguchi Hajime**, *Senior Representative, Japan International Cooperation Agency, India Office*, **Ms. Mikiko Tanaka**, *Head Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific*, and **Mr. Soumya Chattopadhyay**, *Senior Program Officer, South Asia Department, Asian Development Bank, India Resident Mission*. This session was moderated by **Mr. Pritam Banerjee**, *Professor & Head, Centre for WTO Studies*.

The session sought to address the linkages between connectivity, supply chains and the economic opportunities associated with making the connectivity available. Connectivity is not just a matter of physical infrastructure. It is also linked to logistical services and regulatory issues because borders are involved.

**Mr. Hajime (JICA)** is very closely associated with infrastructural uplift in the region, particularly with East India. JICA is a government agency of Japan that coordinates official development assistance, which generally consists of Technical Cooperation, aid and ODA Loan or Private Sector Investment Finance.

The main sector towards which such assistance is channelized includes Transportation (67+ per cent), War (11+ per cent) Energy, (6+ per cent) Agriculture and Forestry (5+ per cent) and Health (2+ per cent). Annual assistance is about Rs. 17 thousand crores (INR). Development-Assistance is focused on India's NE because of landlocked nature and poor connectivity which causes lower productivity compared to the rest of India. This is in line with Japan's increasing strategic focus on Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOLP). JICA has financed road projects in six phases implemented by the National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation (HIDCL).

Several challenges to implementation of such projects include Coordination among agencies, land acquisition and slope protection measures. Building infrastructure needs to be complemented by efficiency at the border point. It is therefore necessary to look beyond borders. There are several soft barriers to connectivity. There is also incoherence in federal setups like India between Central and State level & local level border policies and institutions.

*Ms. Nikore (World Bank)* noted that the World Bank is starting a new initiative called Accelerating Transport and Trade Connectivity in Eastern South Asia. This access programme is two-faceted. This was necessitated by the fact that intra- BBIN trade is far below the potential, almost 60 per cent below potential despite rising figures from 2005 (5 billion \$) to 2018 (18b. £).

India's Northeast stands to benefit the most from BBIN trade because these states bind foreign countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar, which aspire for connectivity with India and BBIN countries. There are recurrent complaints (from private investors) about BBIN constrained by inadequate physical and digital connectivity – both these planks being vital for the north-east.

The ACCESS Programme is a multi-phased approach with a financing envelope of \$1.2 billion. The first phase will concentrate primarily Bangladesh & Nepal (2022-29). The second phase will be channelized into Bhutan - about \$100 million - particularly land ports. India will not qualify for grant financing, so development of the Northeast region of India will depend more on loan/traditional finance. Facilitating conversations among the BBIN countries at multilateral levels is crucial for the growth and development of the subregion.

*Ms. Tanaka (UN ESCAP)* noted that BBIN could be a major driver for economic development of the region. The challenge lies in developing border areas, development of which cannot be taken for granted. Diversity of governance systems alongside wanting infrastructure complicates the system and frustrated implementation of projects.

There are encouraging instances of coordination between India and Bangladesh during the pandemic. She brought to the panel's attention multiple barriers, including:

- Incoherent policies and implementation between centre and state
- Conflicting interests in governance
- Incompatibility between working days and working hours due to variability in different regions of BBIN
- Barter trade prevalent in the region even after being struck down by the Reserve Bank of India in 2015.

She prescribed a holistic approach to corridors - looking at them as economic corridors instead of narrow transport corridors. She also touched upon the working of the UN ESCAP and its digitalization drive. UN ESCAP, would look forward to sharing findings with stakeholders to identify bottlenecks, and would foster paperless trade.

**Mr. Chattopadhyay (ADB)** recognised the fact that BBIN needs coordination and planning for improvement in future trade. ADB is supporting the seven countries of Asia and Southeast Asia through the SASEC program (South Asia Sub Region Economic Program) with partner countries including Maldives, Sri Lanka in addition to BBIN and Myanmar.

For this, six corridors have been identified - the basic purpose is to provide additional port connectivity to the landlocked countries. Each country is being encouraged and assisted to help its national single window and harmonize them with India's. Many still lack electronic data interchange and several border points lack infrastructure facilities.

He reiterated the need to beef up both software and hardware components. All missing links need to be bridged so far as infrastructure development is concerned. The following checklist indicative - trade facilitation strategic framework includes five aspects:

- Customs modernisation and harmonisation
- Standards and conformity assessment standing
- Improvement of cross border facilities
- Transport facilitation
- Institution and capacity building

## **Annexure A: Background Note**

Seamless transport and transit connectivity among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) subregion can be a catalyst for greater intra- and inter-regional trade. This connectivity needs to encompass all modes of transportation, viz. roadways, railways, waterways and airways, including their alignments with each other. This is particularly true in the context of achieving resilience and robustness of post-covid economic recovery.

Cross-border multimodal connectivity can reduce logistic costs and establish robust supply chains, along with addressing infrastructural gaps. Through increased investments and trade, it can also help address broader development issues including poverty, unemployment, women's economic empowerment, particularly for those from marginalised sections of the society.

As BBIN countries are considering multimodal connectivity initiatives such as multimodal Integrated Check Posts, it is necessary to create a well-informed political economy discourse for their benefits to outweigh costs.

CUTS International, with support from the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is implementing the project entitled '**Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multimodal Connectivity in the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Subregion (M-Connect)**' in partnership with Unnayan Shamannay, (Bangladesh), Bodhi Media and Communications Institute, (Bhutan), and Nepal Economic Forum.

Under this project CUTS is organising a Regional Meeting in New Delhi on Thursday, March 02, 2023 that seeks to deliberate on and disseminate the project's findings among the key stakeholders, particularly policy-makers, with the aim of paving the way for achieving positive impacts in respect to both "ease of doing business" and "ease of living" through necessary project, policy, process and delivery interventions for not only making the subregion better integrated in terms of having functional transport corridors but also transforming them to economic corridors.

The meeting will have three informative panel discussions chaired by experts from BBIN countries including government agencies, private sector, policy think-tanks, multilateral agencies etc. The panel discussions will focus on engaging recent initiatives on multimodal connectivity in the BBIN subregion, the political economy challenges, and the future of connectivity opportunities in the BBIN subregion.



## Annexure B: Agenda

<b>09:30 - 10:00</b>	<b>Registration</b>
<b>Opening</b>	
<b>10:00 – 10:40</b>	<p><i>This session will deliberate on the importance of multimodal connectivity in the BBIN subregion, and will highlight challenges and opportunities therein.</i></p> <p><b>Welcome Remarks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Bipul Chatterjee</b>, Executive Director, CUTS International</li> </ul> <p><b>Opening Remarks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A Didar Singh</b>, Former Secretary of Overseas Affairs, Government of India and Distinguished Fellow, CUTS International</li> <li>• <b>Kuancheng Huang</b>, Professor, Department of Transportation and Logistics Management, National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Taiwan</li> <li>• <b>Sutapa Choudhury</b>, Deputy Head, Indo-Pacific Regional Department, India and Indian Ocean Directorate, Foreign, Commonwealth &amp; Development Office, United Kingdom, New Delhi</li> </ul> <p><b>Release of the Study and the Screening of a Video Documentary</b></p>
<b>10:40-11:00</b>	<p><b>Key Note Address</b></p> <p><b>Gopal Krishna</b>, Former Shipping Secretary, Government of India</p>
<b>11:00 - 11:15</b>	<b>Tea/Coffee</b>

Recent Initiatives on BBIN Connectivity	
<b>11:15 - 13:00</b>	<p><i>This session will highlight sector-specific policy and infrastructure developments undertaken by the BBIN governments to promote multimodal connectivity. It will deliberate on good policies, processes and deliveries to address connectivity challenges.</i></p> <p><b>Moderator: Indranil Bose</b>, Consultant, CUTS International</p> <p><b>Panellists</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Neelima Akhter</b>, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges, Bangladesh</li> <li>• <b>Pushpa Chhetri</b>, Director, Bodhi Media &amp; Communications Institute, Bhutan</li> <li>• <b>Sanjeev Gupta</b>, Member (Planning &amp; Development), Land Ports Authority of India, Government of India</li> <li>• <b>Rabi Shanker Sainju</b>, Senior Fellow, Institute of Integrated Development Studies, Former Joint Secretary, Ministry of Industry, Commerce &amp; Supplies, Government of Nepal</li> </ul>
<b>13:00 - 13:45</b>	<b>Lunch</b>

Political Economy Challenges to Multimodal Connectivity	
<b>13:45 - 15:15</b>	<p><i>In this session, insights from a perception survey entitled ‘Enabling Transport Connectivity in the BBIN subregion: Stakeholders’ Perception and Way Forward’ will be presented. By looking at existing political economy challenges, it will deliberate on specific recommendations for enabling a better-informed political economy discourse including their gender and social implication aspects.</i></p> <p><b>Moderator: Mustafizur Rahman</b>, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh</p> <p><b>Presentation: Indranil Bose</b>, Consultant, CUTS International</p> <p><b>Panellists</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Bhimlal Suberi</b>, Former Chief, Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of Information and Communication, Royal Government of Bhutan</li> <li>• <b>Riya Sinha</b>, Associate Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress, New Delhi</li> <li>• <b>Apekshya Shah</b>, Senior Fellow, Nepal Economic Forum</li> </ul>
<b>15:15 - 15:30</b>	<b>Tea/Coffee</b>

<b>Future Connectivity and Trade Opportunities in the BBIN Subregion</b>	
<b>15:30 - 17:00</b>	<p><i>This session will focus on the emerging investment opportunities in the field of multimodal connectivity in the BBIN subregion. It will deliberate on the initiatives undertaken by various bilateral and multilateral agencies tuned to governmental priorities in the infrastructure sector.</i></p> <p><b>Moderator: Pritam Banerjee</b>, Professor &amp; Head, Centre for WTO Studies, New Delhi</p> <p><b>Panellists</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mitali Nikore</b>, Transport Specialist, The World Bank Group, New Delhi</li> <li>• <b>Taniguchi Hajime</b>, Senior Representative, Japan International Cooperation Agency, India Office</li> <li>• <b>Mikiko Tanaka</b>, Head Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, New Delhi</li> <li>• <b>Soumya Chattopadhyay</b>, Senior Program Officer, South Asia Department, Asian Development Bank, India Resident Mission</li> </ul>
<b>17:00</b>	<b>High Tea</b>