

# Event Report

## National Advocacy Dialogue Meeting

**Project Name: Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multi-modal Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region (M-Connect)**  
**02 February 2022**



**Organized by**



**Unnayan Shamannay**

## Preface

International multimodal transport is defined as the carriage of goods by at least two different modes of transport based on a multimodal transport contract from a place in one country at which the goods are taken in charge by the multimodal transport operator to a place designated for delivery situated in a different country. Multimodal transport essentially facilitates door-to-door transport of goods. Bangladesh has immense potential to implement an efficient multimodal transport network thereby facilitating seamless transport of goods between suppliers and receivers. Bangladesh, following an export-led growth model, plans to become a developed nation by 2041 which will invariably strain the already under-pressure transport infrastructure. In light of the reality, multimodal transport system offers itself as potential model to enhance the efficiency of the transport network for Bangladesh by domestic, regional and international integration.

Unnayan Shamannay in association with CUTS International, India, Nepal Economic Forum, Nepal and Bhutan Media and Communication Forum, Bhutan has undertaken research titled '**Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multi-modal Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region (M-Connect)**' supported by UK Aid and Asian Development Bank to understand the challenges and opportunities of establishing an efficient multimodal transport network in Bangladesh.

Recently, a National Advocacy Dialogue Meeting was organized by Unnayan Shamannay in Bangladesh in collaboration with CUTS International where representatives of Multi-Lateral Bodies, Private Sector, Government Departments, Chambers of Commerce/Business, and Members from Business Associations were present. The event participant body comprised of outstation participants, representatives of Unnayan Shamannay, M-connect Project Advocacy members, policy champions and representatives of various public and private entities.

M-connect project findings and stakeholders' opinions were presented in the meeting through a video presentation. Based on the video presentation, a discussion was held where the participants advocated for the implementation of BBIN MVA as well as a sub-regional multimodal transport protocol. All the members acknowledged the importance of promoting multimodal connectivity in the BBIN region. The participants agreed multimodal connectivity in BBIN region will bring forth new opportunities in trade and accelerate both national and international economy.

# **Event Report**

**on**

## **Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multi-modal Connectivity in the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) Sub-region**

**Unnayan Shamannay**

**02 February 2022 (10:30 am – 01:00 pm)**

To take informed policy initiatives and infrastructural development decisions in the context of regional connectivity investment and facilitation, Unnayan Shamannay, a civil society think tank, in collaboration with CUTS International organized a National Advocacy Dialogue Meeting on “Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multi-modal Connectivity in the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) Sub-region”. The organization disseminated their research findings about the challenges and possibilities of multimodal connectivity for Bangladesh part. The meeting was presided by Unnayan Shamannay Chairperson Dr. Atiur Rahman, Senior Project Coordinator Shaheen ul Alam moderated the meeting. Unnayan Shamannay Lead Economist Robart Shuvro Guda and Research Officer Ayan Soofi presented the findings of the M-connect project through a video presentation.

CUTS International Executive Director Bipul Chatterjee, M-Connect Project Advisory Committee Member Ambassador (Retired) Tariq A Karim, M-Connect Project Advisory Committee Member Dr. Nazneen Ahmed, Member of Parliament (Dhaka-10) Md. Shafiul Islam, Member of Parliament (Feni-1) Ms. Shirin Akhter, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Foreign Affairs Member Md. Habibe Millat, Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges Additional Secretary Ms. Neelima Akhter, BIWTA Former Director Mr. Syed Monowar Hussain, India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry Director Motiar Rahman, Ministry of Commerce Additional Secretary (Retired) Monoj Kumar Roy, BIWTA Director (Traffic) & Competent Authority of PIWT&T Md. Rofiqul Islam, Bangladesh Land Port Authority (BLPA) Deputy Director (Traffic) Shamim Shohana, The Financial Express Plan Editor Asjadul Kibria and others participated actively in this session.

Representatives from other government and private organizations including India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry, BSTI, Plant Quarantine Wing, Bangladesh Land Port Authority, Inland Waterways Authority of India, Bhutan Media and Communications Institute and Summit Port participated in this discussion. Also, different representatives from media including Financial Express, Channel 24, Independent TV, Channel-I, Maasranga TV, Ekattor TV, Banglavisión TV, News24 TV, The Business Post, The New Nation, Bangladesh Post, The Daily Star, The Business Insider joined as well.

## Welcome Remarks



Unnayan Shamannay Chairperson Dr. Atiur Rahman welcomed all the participants in the NAD meeting of M-connect Project. He opined that trade and connectivity is important for not only the businesspeople but also the wider population. Thus, the potential increase in trade which can be availed by implementation of BBIN MVA and further by including a multimodal connectivity protocol in the policy, is important for the consumption-led growth sector of the economy. He also felt that BBIN MVA implementation has become even more relevant in the context of national efforts to reverse the

pandemic-induced economic slowdown. He also added that multimodality will also ensure sustainability of the trade and connectivity procedures and stated that the project has been successful in its pursuit of a process documentation of policy and institutional challenges and potential of a multimodal BBIN protocol.

## Purpose of the Meeting

UTS International Executive Director Bipul Chattarjee felt that M-Connect Project has studied and analyzed not only the physical infrastructures of the BBIN countries, but also the potential of transforming the existing routes into multimodal economic corridors. He also spoke that the project has become more important in the light of the upcoming BIMSTEC Summit in Srilanka where the BIMSTEC multimodal connectivity masterplan is supposed to be signed. M-connect project has found alignment with the newfound international political reality. He expressed his hope that Bangladesh will continue on its goal of attaining a more sustainable and equitable economic growth. Capital expenditure in infrastructural development, which has a money multiplier factor of 3-4, has the potential to greatly increase economic activity, thus a coordinated effort to implement BBIN MVA and the consequent multimodal transport protocol has the potential to greatly improve the living standard of the people of BBIN region.



## Keynote Presentation

A video presentation was streamed as the keynote presentation prepared by Unnayan Shamannay Lead Economist Robert Shuvro Guda and Research Officer Ayan Soofi during the event. The video gave a preface of M-connect project and stated the scope of the project. It later went to the four corridors considered in the study. Two alternative multimodal routes were also outlined in the video. Key policy, logistics and infrastructural challenges coming from the field level findings of the M-Connect project (from Bangladesh part) were also presented. The video ended with stakeholder suggestions made during National Reference Group meeting.



## Open Discussion

### **Ms. Shirin Akhter, Member of Parliament (Feni-1)**

Member of Parliament (Feni-1) Ms. Shirin Akhter talked about the importance of gathering popular support for the coordinated efforts required for the implementation of a multimodal transport protocol. She also urged for more pro-people transport infrastructure development. Another aspect of regional connectivity is to conduct proper cost-benefit analysis of such connectivity initiative as well as mid-term evaluation of the necessity of these projects. She felt that any connectivity infrastructure will need to be inclusive so that public good can be maximized. She also stressed on the importance of timely implementation of infrastructure projects all the while acknowledging that Bangladesh government is currently implementing a lot of projects at the same time. She urged for a coordinated effort from all stakeholders to successfully advocate for a BBIN multimodal protocol and implementation of BBIN MVA.



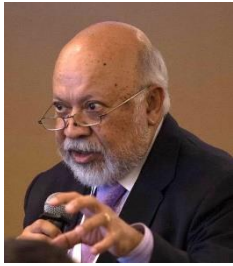
### **Md. Shafiul Islam, Member of Parliament (Dhaka-10)**

Member of Parliament (Dhaka-10) Md. Shafiul Islam agreed with M-connect project findings presented in the video presentation and added with the perception expressed by Former Bangladesh Diplomat Tariq A Karim about the vibrant multimodal connectivity which used to exist in the BBIN sub-region pre-1947. He felt that though the region as a whole has made substantial improvements in terms of regional connectivity initiatives, a lot is yet to be done. He pointed out that an environment of trust needs to be created by all the countries of the BBIN as he felt that the lack of such an environment creates unnecessary hurdles in implementation discussion of important sub-regional connectivity initiatives.

### **Professor Dr Habibe Millat, Member of Parliament (Sirajganj-2)**

Member of Parliament (Sirajganj-2) Professor Dr Habibe Millat also stressed on the importance of increasing the pace of implementation. He believed that the regional political environment and many other geopolitical issues are hindering the pace of implementation of BBIN MVA and the productive dialogue for a regional multimodal transport protocol. He also stated that any regional connectivity agreement will have to be made on the basis of equality among the signatory nations. Professor Millat also advocated for putting more effort in communicating the potential positive impacts of BBIN MVA to the wider population so that public perception about these initiatives can't be distorted.





**Ambassador (Retired) Tariq A Karim, *M-Connect Project Advisory Committee Member***

Former Bangladesh Diplomat Tariq A Karim presented the historical context of the multimodal connectivity which existed in the region during the period of British Raj. He stated that the colonial power which ruled over this region had established a multimodal transport network in the region considering the ecology and efficiency of such flexible systems. Though the advantages of the multimodal connectivity networks were used by the British to extract natural resources from Bengal, now Bangladesh can use that same multimodal transport network as a tool to alleviate poverty. He also advocated that the reintegration of the regional multimodal connectivity networks, which existed pre-1947, can act as a catalyst of growth for all BBIN nations.

**Neelima Akhter, *RTHD Additional Secretary***

Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges Additional Secretary Ms. Neelima Akhter informed that Roads Transport and Highways Division has been planning the road infrastructure keeping all the economic zones as well as integrating all the inland waterways as well as river port, seaport and land ports. She also advised the project personnel to compile the findings of the project and communicate them to National Transport Facilitation Committee (which she is heading) as well as to the Foreign Ministry (as it acts as the leading ministry during international discussions). She thought that apart from the challenge of digitizing National Board Revenue (NBR), a lot of improvement has been done regarding implementation of BBIN MVA.



**Dr. Nazneen Ahmed, *M-Connect Project Advisory Committee Member***



United Nations Development Programme Bangladesh Country Economist Dr. Nazneen Ahmed also stressed on the importance of speedy implementation which was earlier stated by Dr. Atiur Rahman. She also pointed out that of the four BBIN nations, three countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal) are eyeing LDC graduation in the recent future. Bhutan is set to graduate from LDC status in 2023 while Bangladesh and Nepal are expected to do the same in 2026.

One of the biggest issues which emerge in any discussion regarding LDC graduation is the importance of bilateral and multilateral trade and agreements as these agreements are expected to help ensure continuity in its path of economic growth. She opined that evidence produced during the course of M-connect project should be communicated to the policy makers. This will help in the creation of a more resilient policy framework for LDC graduation.

**Motiar Rahman**, *India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry Director*

India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry Director Motiar Rahman gave the example of connectivity cooperation between Bangladesh and India which was observed during the pandemic as liquid oxygen laden Indian tankers were allowed to travel directly to Dhaka, alleviating the oxygen shortage in hospitals of Dhaka. Nonetheless, he cautioned against haphazard implementation of paperless trade regime and proposed a systematic phase-by-phase implementation.

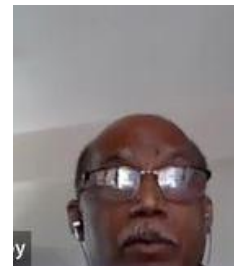


**Syed Monowar Hussain**, *Bangladesh Inland Waterways Transport Authority Director (Retired)*

Bangladesh Inland Waterways Transport Authority Director (Retired) Syed Monowar Hussain urged to delink the inland waterways transport discourse from the trade discourse and align it with the transport discourse. Moreover, he attributed domestic political issues as huge barrier for the BBIN MVA implementation.

**Monoj Kumar Roy**, *Ministry of Commerce Additional Secretary (Retired)*

Ministry of Commerce Additional Secretary (Retired) Monoj Kumar Roy felt that adequate homework was not done before signing the BBIN MVA which has resulted in Bhutan and Nepal not ratifying the MVA as of yet. But, he commended Unnayan Shamannay for working to identify and propose concern redressal mechanisms for BBIN MVA implementation. He also voiced his opinion in favor of creating people-to-people connection.



**Asjadul Kibria**, *Plan Editor, The Financial Express*

The Financial Express Plan Editor Asjadul Kibria expressed his satisfaction and felt that M-connect project has been tremendously successful in creating the environment to foster the dialogue regarding BBIN MVA implementation and a sub-regional multimodal transport protocol.

**Md. Rofiqul Islam, BIWTA Director (Traffic) & Competent Authority of PIWT&T**



BIWTA Director (Traffic) & Competent Authority of PIWT&T Md. Rofiqul Islam informed the forum about the current state of regional trade which takes place through inland waterways. He stated that around 28 lakh metric tons of fly ash are imported from India to Bangladesh through PIWT&T mechanism. Moreover, around 30,000 metric tons of stone chips are imported from Bhutan via Dhubri River Port of India. He also informed that BIWTA is actively working to improve navigability of the inland waterways to facilitate regional trade. He hoped that a BBIN multimodal transport protocol will greatly improve Bangladesh's IWT sector.

**Shamim Shohana, Bangladesh Land Port Authority (BLPA) Deputy Director (Traffic)**



Bangladesh Land Port Authority (BLPA) Deputy Director (Traffic) Shamim Shohana stated that BLPA is investing significantly to facilitate regional trade. She cited the fact that cargo rail wagons transport being permitted through Benapole as an emergency measure due to the pandemic as a model of necessity-led-development. She felt that a BBIN multimodal transport protocol will greatly increase the volume of trade in the region.

## **Vote of Thanks**

**Shaheen ul Alam, Senior Project Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay**



Mr. Shaheen ul Alam expressed his gratitude to the discussants and participants for the meaningful and effective discussion on the issues of multi-modal connectivity related potential and challenges as a whole. He believed that this type of discussion is created lot of scope for the decision makers and others relevant stakeholders for future policy level inputs.

*Note: Event coverages in the national dailies and electronic media and list of participants are given in the annex section of this report*



National Advocacy Dialogue (Online)

**Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multi-modal Connectivity in the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) Sub-region**

(M-Connect Project)

Date: 02.02.2022

List of Participants








Sl.	Name	Designation	Organization
1.	<b>Dr. Atiur Rahman</b>	Chairman	Unnayan Shamannay
2.	<b>Bipul Chatterjee</b>	Executive Director	CUTS International
3.	<b>Ambassador (Retired) Tariq A Karim</b>	Member	Project Advisory Committee, M-Connect
4.	<b>Dr. Nazneen Ahmed</b>	Member	Project Advisory Committee, M-Connect
5.	<b>Mr. Syed Monowar Hussain</b>	Former Director	BIWTA, Ministry of Shipping
6.	<b>Shaheen ul Alam</b>	Senior Project Coordinator	Unnayan Shamannay
7.	<b>Md. Shafiul Islam, MP</b>	Dhaka-10	Bangladesh National Parliament
8.	<b>Ms. Shirin Akhter, MP</b>	Feni-1	Bangladesh National Parliament
9.	<b>Md. Habibe Millat, MP</b>	Member	Standing Committee on Ministry of Foreign Affairs
10.	<b>Ms. Neelima Akhter</b>	Additional Secretary	Urban Transport Wing Road Transport and Highways Division Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges
11.	<b>Md. Anisur Rahman</b>	Joint Secretary	Road Transport and Highways Division Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges
12.	<b>Md. Habibur Rahman</b>	Additional Secretary (Development & Planning)	Ministry of Railways
13.	<b>Robart Shuvro Guda</b>	Senior Research Associate	Unnayan Shamannay
14.	<b>Ayan Soofi</b>	Research Officer	Unnayan Shamannay
15.	<b>Md. Rofiqul Islam</b>	Director (Traffic) & Competent Authority of PIWT&T	BIWTA, Ministry of Shipping
16.	<b>Ms. Sharmila Khanam</b>	Deputy Director (Foreign Transport)	BIWTA, Ministry of Shipping
17.	<b>Ms. Afsana Hossain</b>	Field Officer	BSTI
18.	<b>Jewel Rana</b>	Additional Deputy Director (Export)	Plant Quarantine Wing Dept. of Agricultural Extension
19.	<b>Shamim Shohana</b>	Deputy Director (Traffic)	Bangladesh Land Port Authority

20.	<b>Mr. Monoj Kumar Roy</b>	Former Additional Secretary (FTA)	Ministry of Commerce
21.	<b>Zinia Sharmin</b>	Research Associate	Unnayan Shamannay
22.	<b>Byezid Limon</b>	Research Officer	Unnayan Shamannay
23.	<b>Mr. Abdul Matlub Ahmad</b>	President	India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry
24.	<b>Mr. S M Abul Kalam Azad</b>	Secretary General	India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry
25.	<b>Mr. Motiar Rahman</b>	Director	India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry
26.	<b>Mr. Sudhir Chandra Nath</b>	Head of Business	ACI Ltd
27.	<b>M. K. Saha</b>	Ex. Chief Engineer	IWAI
28.	<b>Pushpa Chhetri</b>	Director	Bhutan Media and Communications Institute
29.	<b>Shiva Raj Chhetri</b>	Deputy Managing Director	Bhutan Media and Communications Institute
30.	<b>Md. Abdul Hakim</b>	Chief Operating Officer	Summit Port
31.	<b>Suresh P Singh</b>	Fellow	CUTS International
32.	<b>Jithin Sabu</b>	Senior Research Associate	CUTS International
33.	<b>Johir Rayhan</b>	Research Officer	Unnayan Shamannay
34.	<b>Md. Masudul Hasan</b>	Research Associate	Unnayan Shamannay
35.	<b>Quasar Ali</b>	Research Associate	CUTS International
36.	<b>Rageshree Bose</b>	Senior Research Associate	CTS International, Kolkata
37.	<b>Zahid Rahman</b>	Senior Project Coordinator	Unnayan Shamannay
38.	<b>Md. Mahabub Hasan</b>	Senior Research Associate	Unnayan Shamannay
39.	<b>Mr Asjadul Kibria</b>	Plan Editor	The Financial Express
40.	<b>Representative</b>	Journalist	Channel 24
41.	<b>Representative</b>	Journalist	Independent TV
42.	<b>Mr. Rezvi Newaz</b>	Special Correspondent	Channel-I
43.	<b>Representative</b>	Journalist	Maasranga TV
44.	<b>Ms. Kaberi Maitraya</b>	Staff Reporter	71 TV
45.	<b>Syed Abdul Muhit</b>	Journalist	Banglavisoin
46.	<b>Representative</b>	Journalist	News24 TV
47.	<b>Mehedi Al Amin</b>	Senior Reporter	Business Post
48.	<b>Mithu Ahmed</b>	Senior Reporter	The New Nation
49.	<b>Saif Uddin</b>	Reporter	Bangladesh Post
50.	<b>Sukanta Halder</b>	Staff Correspondent	The Daily Stat
51.	<b>Sova</b>	Reporter	The Business Insider

<b>52.</b>	<b>Sanjib Kumar</b>		
<b>53.</b>	<b>Shamim Ahmed</b>		
<b>54.</b>	<b>Swati Varma</b>		
<b>55.</b>	<b>Tasnim Mohsin</b>		
<b>56.</b>	<b>Munima Sultana</b>		
<b>57.</b>	<b>Muhit</b>		

## Annex-I

### Events coverages in the national dailies and electronic media

SL	Media Name	News Title	News Link
1	Channel 24 TV 	বাংলাদেশ ভারত নেপাল ও ভূটানের মধ্যে বাণিজ্য সম্ভাবনাকে কাজে লাগিয়ে অর্থনীতির উন্নয়ন সম্ভব	<a href="#">Link</a>
2	Ekattor TV 	করোনায় অর্থনৈতিক ক্ষতি পুনরুদ্ধারে আঞ্চলিক সংযোগ ছাড়া আসার জন্য বাংলাদেশ ভারত নেপাল ও ভূটানের মধ্যে সরাসরি জান চলাচল নীতি দ্রুত বাস্তবায়নের আহবান জানিয়েছেন অর্থনীতিবিদরা	<a href="#">Link</a>
3	Independent TV 	নেপাল ও ভূটানের আগ্রহের অভাবে বাংলাদেশ ভারত ভূটার ও নেপাল বিবিআইএন চুক্তির অগ্রগতি নেই... তবে নেপালের সম্মতি পাওয়ামাত্রই চুক্তি এগিয়ে যাবে বলছেন সংশ্লিষ্টরা...	<a href="#">Link</a>
4	News 24 TV 	করোনা মহামারীর ক্ষতি কাটিয়ে উঠতে পাশবতীদেশগুলোর সাথে এক হয়ে কাজ করার ঝকিল নেই বলে মনে করেন অর্থনীতিবিদরা...	<a href="#">Link</a>
5	Maasranga TV 	আঞ্চলিক যোগাযোগ চুক্তি বিবিআইএন বাস্তবায়নে বাংলাদেশ ভারত নেপাল ও ভূটান মেধ্যে সমন্বিত পরিবহন কর্মসূচী প্রয়োজন...	<a href="#">Link</a>
6	The Daily Star 	BBIN deal to create scope for cost-effective transport em: experts	<a href="#">Link</a>
7	The Financial Express 	BBIN MVA to open multimodal connectivity in sub-region	<a href="#">Link</a>

8	 The Business Standard	Political mistrust hindering regional motor vehicle agreement	<a href="#">Link</a>
9	 The New Nation	BBIN deal to create scope for cost-effective transport system	<a href="#">Link</a>
10	 Bangladesh Post	MVA implementation to expedite multimodal connectivity Speakers at Unnayan Shamannay dialogue	<a href="#">Link</a>
12	 Business Insider	BBIN MVA implementation will open potentials of multimodal connectivity: Speakers	<a href="#">Link</a>
14	 Jute Flash	BBIN deal to create scope for cost-effective transport system: experts - The Daily Star	<a href="#">Link</a>
15	 Bonik Barta	উন্নয়ন সমন্বয়ে ন্যাশনাল অ্যাডভোকেসি ডায়ালগ অনুষ্ঠিত	<a href="#">Link</a>
16	 Ajker Patrik	ভাচুয়াল সভায়, সংকট সমাধানে জোর আঞ্চলিক সহযোগিতায়	<a href="#">Link</a>
17	 Barta 24.com	বিবিআইএন এমভিএ চুক্তি খুলে দেবে মাল্টি- মোডাল যোগাযোগের বিশাল দুয়ার	<a href="#">Link</a>
18	 Daily Bangla Newspapers	বিবিআইএন এমভিএ চুক্তি খুলে দেবে মাল্টি- মোডাল যোগাযোগের বিশাল দুয়ার	<a href="#">Link</a>

	The Daily Bangla Newspaper		
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