

**Seventh BIMST-EC Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM)  
Bangkok, 5-6 February 2004**

**Progress Report by India on BIMST-EC Cooperation  
In Transport and Communication**

As the lead country for BIMST-EC Cooperation in the Transport and Communication sector, India had organized the 1<sup>st</sup> Expert Group Meeting in New Delhi on 23-24 April 2001, where the entire gamut of subjects such as transport and cross-border facilitation, multi modal transport and logistics, infrastructure development, aviation, maritime transport, including shipping, inland water transport and ports; human resource development, communication linkages and networking was discussed. Subsequently, action has been initiated on a number of recommendations made by the meeting.

**Meeting of the Chief Executive's of Railways**

India had circulated a draft agenda as well as proposed a date for the meeting, which was to consider a mechanism for regular exchange of information and share technical specifications of the different railway networks in the region. Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand have agreed to the draft agenda. On the basis of 3÷X formula, India may perhaps convene the first meeting of the CEOs of the railway authorities of the BIMST-EC countries at an early date.

India has also proposed a pre-feasibility study for the rail link between New Delhi and Hanoi under Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) in the transport and communication sector. Action has been taken to commission, in the first phase, a study by RITES India Ltd, of the 315 km long missing link of difficult hilly terrain between Jiribam (India) and Kalay (Myanmar). India has also offered a credit line of US \$ 56 million to Myanmar for upgrading the Mandalay-Yangon section of the railway.

**Preparation of Compendium of Training Facilities in Transport and Communication**

One of the recommendations of the expert-level meeting was the preparation of a compendium of training facilities in the transport and communication sector. Accordingly, BIMST-EC member countries had been requested to forward status papers on this subject to India, so that the same could be collated into a compendium by the Asian Institute of Transport Development, New Delhi.

At the Fifth BIMST-EC Ministerial Meeting, India had offered 20 additional training places to each member country under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme. These additional training places could also be utilized for capacity building and human resource development in the transport and communication sector. Thailand, too, has obvious strengths in road sector, e.g. in highway and flyover construction, etc., as well as in inland waterway transport, which would be of great relevance to all members. It is for this reason that the compilation

of a compendium of training facilities will be a useful guide for all member countries in seeking assistance in capacity building in this sector.

So far, only Thailand has sent its information on its training facilities. The other member countries are requested to forward relevant information to India at the earliest so that the compendium could be compiled and published.

#### Status Paper on Multi modal Transport Operations

In the area of multi modal transport and logistics, the experts had

recommended that, as a first step, status papers for multi modal transport operations be developed by each country. India has already circulated its status paper to the member countries. So far, Sri Lanka and Thailand have submitted their status papers. Responses of the other member countries are awaited.

On the paper submitted by Thailand, the Asian Institute of Transport Development, New Delhi, has, while appreciating the paper, commented that it would be desirable to incorporate additional coverage of the facilities available in Thailand for training of personnel in the operation and management of container terminals. These observations have been conveyed to Thailand. The other member countries are reminded to send in their status papers expeditiously.

#### Study of Major Surface Routes and Border Crossings

In the context of transport and cross-border facilitation, the 1<sup>st</sup> expert group meeting had recommended a study of major land routes and border crossing points. However, as Sri Lanka is an island, the study has been renamed as “Study of Major Surface Routes and Border Crossings”. This project is among the BIMST-EC priority projects in transport and communication.

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India had offered to coordinate the studies for the India-Bangladesh, India-Sri Lanka, India-Myanmar and Thailand-Myanmar border crossings. With the entry of Nepal and Bhutan, studies of their border crossings with India would be included in the study. Asian Institute of Transport Development (AITD), New Delhi, has offered to carry out the study for the Thailand-Myanmar border. Accordingly, AITD could carry out the study subject to the concurrence of the governments of Thailand and Myanmar. While India is identifying a suitable agency for carrying out the study of India-Myanmar border, it may be mentioned that a major project for enhancing connectivity between North Eastern India and Myanmar is the Kaladan multi-modal transport project. The first phase of the projects consists of up gradation of port of Sittwe, navigability of river Kaladan till Kaletwa. The second phase involves the development of highway from Kaletwa to Indo-Myanmar border at Mizoram. RITES has completed the first phase of the DPR for the project. The second phase began in December 2002. The DPR for the inland waterway transport (IWT) portion has been

submitted by RITES and is under examination by Government of India. A copy of the same has also been forwarded to Myanmar for comments.

Also, Asian Development Bank (ADB) is undertaking two studies that would address various issues pertaining to facilitation of passenger and goods traffic between India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. The studies inter alia, deal with the identification of specific measures to enhance the efficiency of individual sub-regional corridors with particular emphasis on the solution of choke point problems at key land-based and sea-based gateways and removal of institutional and operational impediments, and with upgrading of India's national and state highways linking West Bengal's ports of Kolkata and Haldia with eastern India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. Both of the studies will be followed by full-fledged loans for implementation of the project proposals prepared.

Between India and Sri Lanka, all issues pertaining to the facilitation of trade and movement of people will be covered in the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) to be negotiated.

At present, Government of India is, inter alia, in the process of identifying the studies already carried out. It is important for ensuring efficient use of limited resources that there be no duplication and full use made of any recent studies carried out by reputed organizations and consultants and their recommendations. It would be very helpful if the member countries could provide relevant information available with them to India. Financing of the study of any given route or border crossing may be worked out by the countries concerned.

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#### Programme of Cooperation in Inland Waterways

India has proposed the setting up of a task force chaired by Thailand, where inland water transport is the most developed in the BIMST-EC sub-region, for coming up with a medium-term (3-5 year) programme of cooperation, with a timeframe. In case this suggestion is endorsed by the member countries, Thailand will be requested to prepare a concept paper and share among other members, for eliciting their comments. Once the concept paper is finalized, the task force could meet for preparing a medium-term cooperation programme, as well as a timetable for its implementation. The Kaladan multi-modal transport project would be very important for the integrated development of road, rail and inland waterway transport. India's suggestion for constituting a task force was conveyed to the other member countries in early September 2003. The response of the other member countries is awaited and the same may be conveyed expeditiously to India so that further action could be taken.

#### India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project

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The project was launched at a meeting of the three Foreign Ministers in Yangon in April 2002. It envisages (a) construction of a highway about 1400 km. Long, from Moreh in India to Mae Sot in Thailand through Bagan in Myanmar; (b) promotion of a highway from Kanchanaburi in Thailand to Dawei Deep Sea Port in Myanmar and shipping links to sea ports in India. The Ministers agreed to a work programme comprising three phases. Task forces on technical and financial matters were set up to implement the decisions. The 2<sup>nd</sup> ministerial meeting was held in New Delhi on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2003. The ministers discussed the route alignment recommended by the task force on technical matters after conducting the field survey of the 1360 km stretch, as well as Myanmar's proposal for altering the alignment of the Thaton-Kawkareik section.

The DPRs of the various segments are to be completed at the earliest so that concrete proposals for financing could be formulated. To expedite completion of the project, the Ministers authorized the technical task force to consider other methods of implementation. A group of senior officials will review the work done by the task forces and work towards signing of a Protocol that would address administrative and legal arrangements for free travel and transit of goods. In this regard, Myanmar has been requested to prepare a concept paper for the consideration of the senior officials, who would also explore the possibility of private sector participation. Also, due attention would be given to maintenance of the highway. India and Thailand have offered training courses in road maintenance.

The Ministers have agreed to meet again in 2004 in Mandalay, Myanmar. Aside from boosting trade, tourism and people-to-people interaction, the highway will strengthen trilateral cooperation on border management, including drug trafficking. The upgrading and deepening of the Dawei Port should provide Thailand with a much shorter overland link to the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal vis-à-vis the existing route via Malacca straits.

#### Feasibility Study in Short-Sea Shipping Development among BIMST-EC Countries

Thailand has proposed a feasibility study in shipping short-sea development among BIMST-EC countries as a priority project. Prima facie, it appears to be a promising project for providing speedy maritime connectivity between member countries of BIMST-EC for movement of goods and passenger traffic. In this context, a new concept being proposed is the development of feeder services from major ports along the Bay of Bengal rim to a central hub in the Bay of Bengal. If such a hub were to be commissioned in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the distances to all the ports in the BIMST-EC sub-region can be covered between 17 to 38 hours by fast-moving vessels. It is suggested that the feasibility study on short sea shipping suggested by Thailand consider this idea in greater detail. Thailand is requested to circulate a concept paper so that further action could be considered.

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