



Program Report
Round Table Meeting on
“Prospects and Challenges on Nepal-India-Bangladesh Trilateral Co-operation”
The Malla Hotel, Kathmandu, 4th December, 2017

Abstract

Despite of the proximity and commonalities in terms of history, language and culture the three countries in South Asia; Nepal, Bangladesh and India have not been able to exploit the full fledged benefits of cooperation. The program aims to discuss the prospects and challenges of cooperation in the South Asian sub region, especially between Nepal-India-Bangladesh and recommend the policy priorities to all respective governments to promote and accelerate cooperation for inclusive economic growth. It intends to bring policy makers and policy experts from all the countries along with media persons, academicians, business personalities, bureaucrats and other concerned stakeholders.

Introduction-AIDIA

The Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA) is an independent, non-partisan foreign policy think-tank based in Kathmandu, Nepal. AIDIA aims to lead a new era in foreign policy and international relations and reflects the unstoppable rise of the Asian continent as the key stakeholder in the economic, strategic and geo-political equations of the present day world. AIDIA provides a platform for policy makers, academicians and industry leaders from around the world to come together to debate, discuss and share their views on the contemporary geopolitical and geo-economic issues confronting the international community. We seek to do



this by facilitating effective engagement through the various activities in order to inform, educate and initiate the involvement of Nepal's youth in foreign policy debates and decision-making. AIDIA is actively engaged in providing policy analysis, facilitating diplomatic dialogue and promoting entrepreneurial engagement among all major actors and institutions native to or that have an interest in Asia.

Introduction- Embassy of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, Kathmandu

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh represents the State to foreign governments and international organizations through its missions across the globe. The Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Kathmandu, Nepal is one of them. Opening date of this Mission is 03 October 1971, though the diplomatic relations of Bangladesh and Nepal was established on 8 April, 1972. Nepal is the 8th country in the world recognizing Bangladesh as a sovereign country on 16 January 1972. Role of the Embassy of Bangladesh in Nepal is to put its best effort to strengthen and enhance the excellent relationship between Bangladesh and Nepal.

Program report

The Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA) and Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Nepal jointly hosted the **Round Table Meeting on “Prospects and Challenges on Nepal-India-Bangladesh Trilateral Co-operation”** in Kathmandu, Nepal on December 4, 2017. The major objectives of the program was to discuss the prospects and challenges of economic cooperation amidst Nepal-India-Bangladesh and recommend the policy priority to all respective governments to promote mutually inclusive economic benefits.

H.E. Ms. Mashfee Binte Shams Ambassador of Bangladesh to Nepal delivered the welcome remarks in the program and she acknowledged Dr. Gowher Rizvi's tireless work towards regional integration, with particular attention on trade and commerce, hydropower cooperation and energy.



Dr. Gowher Rizvi, International Affairs Adviser to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh delivered the keynote speech. Dr. Rizvi said ‘whenever we talk about regional cooperation, people ask what has been achieved? And what has been done? And over the years the general skepticism has grown about the regional integration’, he added. He talked about ‘ignored proximity’ by the member states and stressed on promoting commonalities is the first steps towards trilateral and regional cooperation. On the other hand, we are in the region which is extremely positively well located between two thriving economies, China and India and both these countries have interest in the stability and prosperity of the smaller countries of the region. So, without much notice a real opportunity was created for development, he said. Dr. Rizvi also acknowledged that as a major economic giant of the region, India should play the important role to give the real impetus for the trilateral and regional co-operation. He also focused on energy cooperation, and added that the problem of lack of adequate energy is the major impediment of inclusive economic growth of the region. For example India’s largest hydroelectricity potentials are in the northeastern area up to Arunachal, Assam, Guwahati. But the demand for energy power is in West Bengal, Bihar, UP and Jharkhand. In order to supply the demand of energy to those areas, it has to go through Bangladesh. So, India’s ability to harness depends on cooperation with Bangladesh, he said. In order to take the optimum advantage of our proximity, connectivity should be the central part of our effort, Dr, Rizvi said. He also talked about the need of exploring Mongla and Chittagong port, as Bangladesh has already provided Nepal to use those port facilities. Moreover, he also talked about promoting spiritual tourism and importance of cooperation in the area like climate change. Most importantly, Dr. Rizvi expressed the need of ‘high-level well prepared tripartite dialogue’ between Bangladesh-India-Nepal and said he will take this idea to Dhaka.

In response to the observation and questions from the distinguished participants, Dr. Rizvi replied, there are two parts of the connectivity one is the political and another is physical part of the connectivity. It is also necessary to take into consideration of the feasibility of the project and development of the SOP for the utilization of various connectivity projects. One of the best ways to manage the trade imbalance is to facilitate the investment. While talking about the BBIN-MVA, Dr. Rizvi considered that Bhutan has some genuine problems with BBIN-MVA. Citing the examples of Dhaka-Calcutta railways connection, Rizvi, shared his optimism that trilateral and sub-regional will be there on right time. Dr. Rizvi agreed on water resource management and

promotion of regional spiritual tourism circuit. He stated, ‘our ability to eliminate the poverty depends upon our ability to eliminate the corruption’. Finally, Dr, Rizvi said that good stories don’t break in news; there are many good stories in our sub-region.

In special remarks, Mr. Chandra Kumar Ghimire, Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Nepal, while agreeing on most of the area touched by Dr. Rizvi, stressed connectivity should be prioritized to promote cross-border economic activities. Energy is obviously one of the areas where we need to work and put our greater amount of efforts. Bangladesh could be very instrumental and India obviously, always being at the center has been supportive, but the level of our common understanding what we have put forward might not be adequate, he said.

The trade related facilities are also another front, where Bangladesh could be very instrumental to support our sub regional trade. Mongla and Chittagong port are the one of the most viable port available with us but we need to explore more on it, Mr. Ghimire said. The motor vehicle agreement under BBIN urges our greater attention. BBIN and BIMSTEC obviously can be instrumental to promote regional integration but words should not be limited only in the documents. They have to come in action and in effect, that should trigger greater amount of our preparedness, our commitment and determination; especially from the top level i.e. from political level and then bureaucratic level and then goes ladder by ladder like, technical level. We need to mobilize our total strength then only it becomes possible, he stressed.

Some Observations and Questions from Distinguished Participants

Dr. Bishnu Hari Nepal, Former Ambassador of Nepal to Japan, talked about the Integrated Water Resource Management of South Asia and emphasized on connecting connectivity project of BRI with BBIN to make it more effective. Dr. Bishnu Hari also said, if it is not possible to hold 19 SAARC Summit in Islamabad, why not to hold it in Nepal, in order to save SAARC. He also suggested exploring the possibility of developing tunnel in Chicken Neck from eastern boarder of Nepal to Bangladesh considering the security sensitivity of the India, which can be beneficial for all countries.

Dr. Ajay Kumar, Deputy Chief Mission, Embassy of India in Nepal expressed that three countries are already working on numbers of trilateral issues including connectivity, stating the BBIN as a live example, where three countries are working to operationalize the connectivity project. While responding the some of the proposal floated by Dr. Bishnu Hari, he said India is happy to see any such proposal formally and stressed that India definitely is committed to work on regional connectivity.

Mr. Bhrigu Dhungana, Joint-Secretary Ministry of foreign Affair of Nepal, informed that sub-regional working group has been formed in foreign ministry level and they already held three rounds of the meeting while identifying the core areas for cooperation like water resources, trade, transit and connectivity. Although, we are moving in the right direction, what we need now is deeper dialogue at higher level to concretize the ideas, he stressed. Mr. Bhrigu said, finding out the operation modalities and the framework for the implementation of the identified sectors is important as Nepal and Bangladesh is planning to sign MoU on energy sector cooperation. He also outlined the significance of establishing permanent institutional mechanism (secretary or technical level) which will greatly facilitate the realization of the regional and sub-regional cooperation.

Mr. Purushottam Ojha, Former Secretary, Ministry of Commerce of Nepal, suggested that Nepal-Bangladesh and India should move forward to operationalize the BBIN-MVA, in which Bhutan can join later. Mr. Ojha, also emphasized on developing sub-regional power grid to promote energy cooperation among the countries. In the context of current different custom procedures in Nepal, Bangladesh and India, harmonizing custom procedures is another area that three countries should work on to enhance the efficiency of trade and also added on developing sub-regional transit and transportation agreement.

Mr. Gyandendra Lal Pradhan, Treasurer of FNCCI, stressed that going with the compulsion, relations is important. As around 60 million people from Southern part of Nepal, UP & Bihar and Bangladesh is dependent in Nepal's water, it is important to coordinate the water resource management including flood control and management of systematic irrigation system. He also emphasized on energy cooperation and also said countries should come together to eradicate poverty.

Ms. Sreejana Rana, Executive Director of Hotel Annapurna, emphasized on joint tourism cooperation including development of the Buddhist Circuit.

H. E. WS Perera, Sri Lankan Ambassador to Nepal expressed that lacking of connectivity in South Asian region is hindering the economic and cultural connection among member states.

During the meeting, representatives from different diplomatic missions, policy experts, academician, business persons, government authorities, media persons and other concern stakeholders actively participated in the discussion.

In closing remarks, CEO of AIDIA, Mr. Sunil KC, expressed his gratitude to the distinguished speakers and guests and said that respective governments should seriously engage in the promotion of trilateral cooperation and promised to continue such forum for healthy discourse aiming to contribute mutually beneficial relations.

Kathmandu, 4th December, 2017



From left Mr. Sunil KC (CEO, AIDIA), Dr. Gowher Rizvi (International Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister of People Republic of Bangladesh), H. E. Mashfee Binte Shams

(Ambassador, People's Republic of Bangladesh to Nepal) and Mr. Chandra Kumar Ghimire (Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, GoN).



Participants of the program



H. E. WS Perera, Sri Lankan Ambassador to Nepal giving her remarks.



Dr. Ajay Kumar (DCM, Embassy of India, Nepal) giving his remarks.



Ms. Kamana Magar (Operative Director, AIDIA) presenting token of love to Dr. Gowher Rizvi (International Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister of People Republic of Bangladesh)

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