

BCIM AND CONNECTIVITY FOR BANGLADESH: ANALYSING ITS POLITICO, SECURITY AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

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*Security is not military hardware, though it may include it; security is not military force though it may involve it; security is not traditional military activity, though it may encompass it.
Security is development and without development, there can be no security.*

-McNamara

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC), fostered from previous 'Kunming Initiative' of 1999, is a quadrilateral initiative with an agenda of promoting regional trade and economic development by building multi-modal connectivity, harnessing economic complementarities and enhancing people-to-people relations. The BCIM region is one of the richest in the world in terms of natural, mineral and other resources. The BCIM-EC has the potential to generate enormous economic benefits in the arena of trade, investment, energy, transport and communication (Bhattacharjee, R 2015). The Corridor is proposed to connect India's Northeast, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and the Chinese province of Yunnan through a network of roads, railways, waterways, and airways under a proper regulatory framework. This particular grouping bears some unique attributes which can potentially bring significant benefits to the four participating countries through deepening of economic cooperation and integration by leveraging on three types of connectivity: transport connectivity, trade connectivity and investment connectivity (Rahman, M 2014). Needless to say, the regions through which the proposed BCIM communication network runs are characterized by poverty, ethnic division, insurgency, smuggling, drug and women trafficking and collision and rampant transnational crimes particularly in Golden Triangle region. Bilateral tensions on border disputes, illegal trespassing, smuggling, drug and human trafficking or allegation and counter allegation on harbouring insurgencies often escalate around the areas through which the proposed communication hub is designed. Thus, being an initiative of the same region, BCIM led economic development can play the most effective role in eliminating these security vulnerabilities to enhance the security and a platform for long term political bondage of the region. Notwithstanding the fact,

there is no institutional framework in BCIM agenda for directly promoting security as well as political bondage from aspired socio-economic development. In this context, a study is highly essential to outline a comprehensive approach on how best we can tailor the socio-economic development through BCIM initiative towards the enhancement of security and political bondage of the region focusing Bangladesh.

PROSPECTS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION AND BANGLADESH THROUGH BCIM -EC

Historical Perspective of BCIM

The concept of establishing closer economic cooperation within BCIM region was first developed by Professor Rehman Sobhan. BCIM integration through multi-modal transport connectivity and supported by other initiatives and infrastructure development could reduce transaction costs, encourage trade and investment. Thereby it would accelerate growth, reduce poverty and enhance security in this region. This pioneering ideas of Professor Sobhan motivated the platform which he helped to establish, which later came to be known as the Kunming initiative (Rahman, M 2014). The first Joint Study Group (JSG) meeting was held on 21 December 2013 in Kunming. Bangladesh hosted the second JSG meeting in the beach city of Cox's Bazar in 21 November 2014. The third JSG will be held in Kolkata, India in 2015 (Moazzem, K G 2015).

Rationale for BCIM EC Initiative and the Concept

At present, domestic trade of India's NE States with rest of India, or for that matter, its trade with outside world, is contingent on movement of goods through the chicken neck (a distance of about 1200-1600 km). Trade of Yunnan Province of China with outside world is contingent on goods moving more than two thousand kilometers east to the South China sea and thereon moving onward after transshipment. A Southern route for N.E. region and Kunming through Chittagong port would bring the distance down to 400-700 km, reduce the cost of moving goods significantly and would also lead to considerable reduction in the lead time. For Bangladesh and Myanmar, BCIM cooperation would offer them greater access in the growing markets of China and India if competitive strength could be raised by establishing seamless connectivity, reducing barriers to movement of goods and vehicles across borders and by attracting investment (Rahman, M 2014)

Potentials of BCIM – EC Initiative for the Region

Given the commonalities in terms of history, culture, languages and trade complementary in many cases, the BCIM-EC is a win-win arrangement. The linkages of transport, trade and investment, energy, agriculture and telecommunications networks will enable the region to emerge as a thriving economic belt that will promote economic and social development of communities along the Corridor.

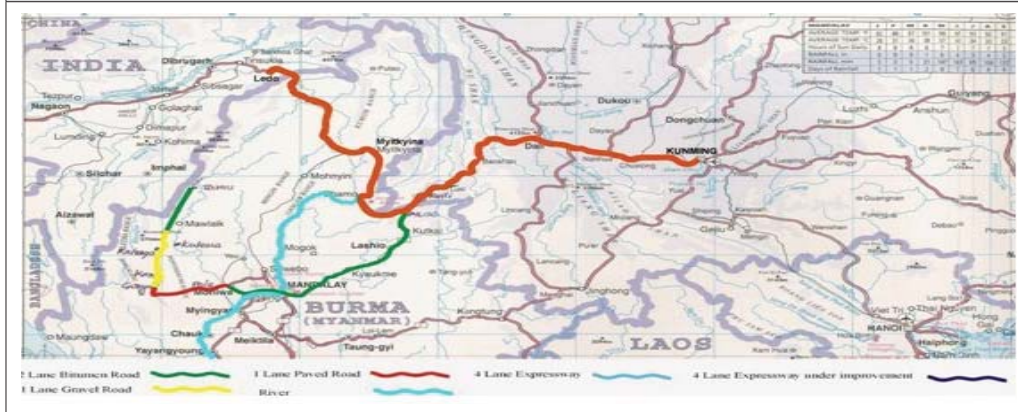
Road Transport Connectivity

For BCIM-EC, three routes have been identified as the most probable transit routes for the region. However, each route has its own merits and demerits (Hossain 2014):

North Route

This route will start from Kunming, pass through Baoshan-Tengchong-Houqiao (China-Myanmar border)-Myitkyina (Myanmar) – and will connect Ledo (India). It is found to be the shortest road link from Kunming to Ledo (India).

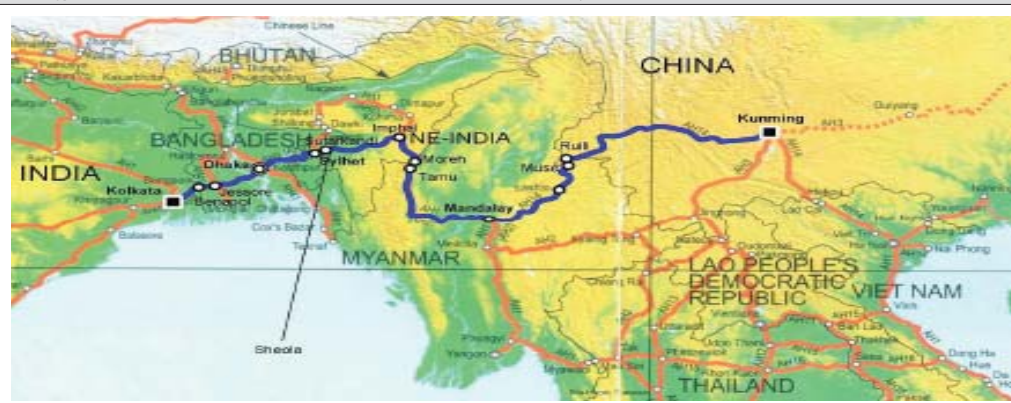
Map 1: The North Route



Middle Route

This route will connect Kunming with Kolkata through Ruili (Yunnan border city with Myanmar)-Bhamo-Lashio-Mandalay-Tamu (Myanmar)-Imphal (India)-Sylhet and then Dhaka (Bangladesh). This route has been identified as the best conditioned route to be used at present.

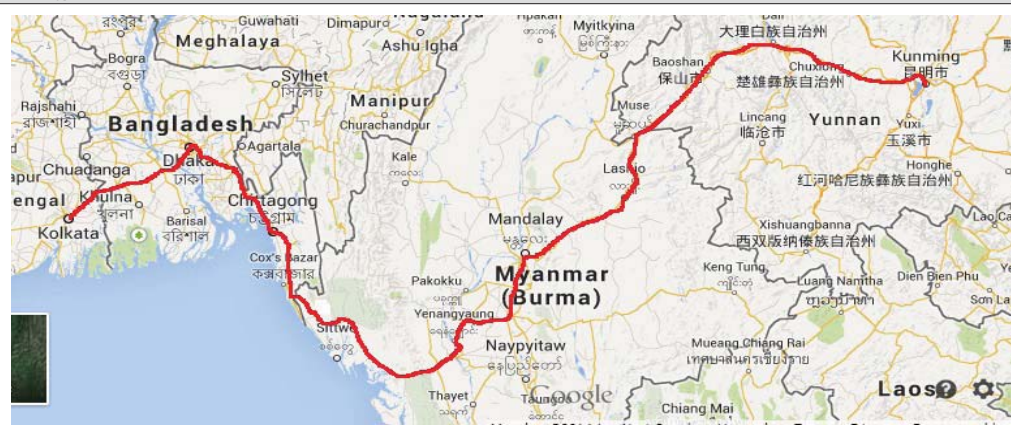
Map 2: The Middle Route (also the Car Rally Route)



South Route

The possible route will connect Kunming with Kolkata through Ruili (Yunnan border city with Myanmar)-Lashio-Mandalay–Meiktila-Ma-gway (Myanmar)-Chittagong (Bangladesh)-Dhaka and then Kolkata (India).

Map 3: The South Route



This route will add immense value to Bangladesh's economic growth and trade.

Likely Cooperation in the Area of Trade and Investment

It is perceived that the BCIM sub-region possesses enormous potential in regard to expanding trade and investment. Therefore one of the most important aims of creating BCIM-EC is to expand trade and investment among the member countries.

Present Trends and Pattern of Intra-BCIM Trade

From 2004 to 2013 Intra-BCIM export has gained six fold increases from US\$ 15.4 billion to US\$ 91.1 billion and intra- BCIM import has increased more than five times from US\$ 18.8 billion to US\$ 97.0 billion. During this period overall growth of Intra-BCIM trade was higher than total trade of BCIM countries. As a result, share of BCIM trade in its total global trade has increased.

A closer look of the contribution of BCIM countries in the intra-BCIM trade shows that dominance of China in intra-BCIM export has increased substantially from 57 percent in 2004 to 72 percent in 2013. This resulted in drop of share of India from 38 percent to 23 percent. On the other hand, shares of Bangladesh and Myanmar, which were insignificant, remained unchanged during this period (Figure 1 and 2). As regards Intra-BCIM import, although contribution of China was the highest in year 2003 representing 42 percent of intra-BCIM import, it has dropped drastically to 21 percent in 2013. During this period import of India from BCIM region has increased manifold and its share increased to 55 percent from 35 percent in intra-BCIM import. During this period, Bangladesh's share registered a slight decline (2 percent), while Myanmar's share has increased by 3 percent (Figures 3 and 4). This change also reflected in shares of BCIM countries in Intra-BCIM Trade. During this period, shares of China and Bangladesh have dropped by 3 and 2 percents, while shares of India and Myanmar have enhanced by 3 and 2 percents (Figures 5 and 6). (Khan 2014)

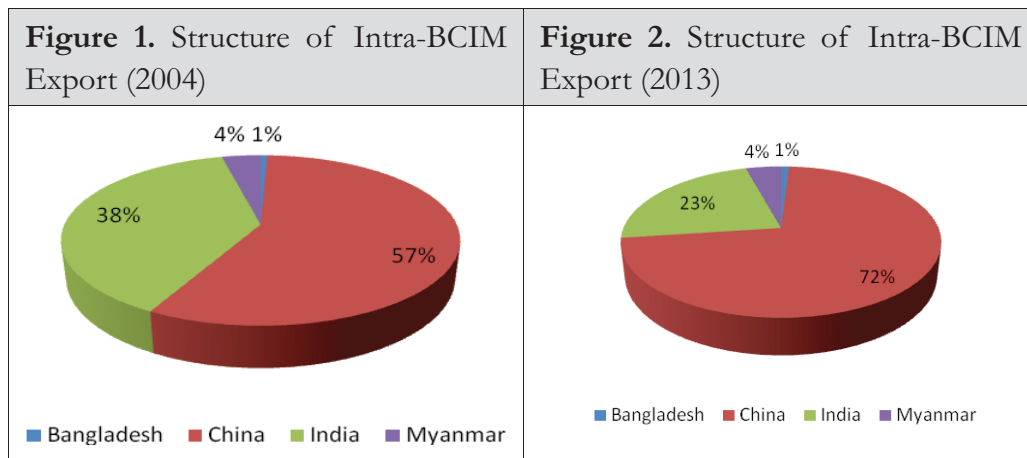
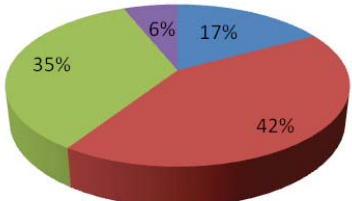
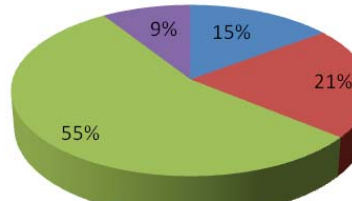
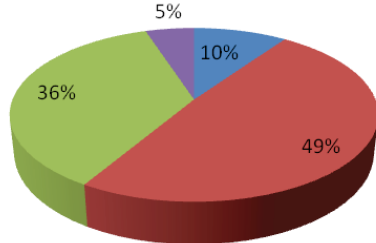
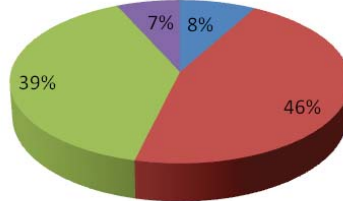


Figure 3. Structure of Intra-BCIM Import (2004)	Figure 4. Structure of Intra-BCIM Import (2013)
 <p>■ Bangladesh ■ China ■ India ■ Myanmar</p>	 <p>■ Bangladesh ■ China ■ India ■ Myanmar</p>
Figure 5. Structure of Intra-BCIM Trade (2004)	Figure 6. Structure of Intra-BCIM Trade (2013)
 <p>■ Bangladesh ■ China ■ India ■ Myanmar</p>	 <p>■ Bangladesh ■ China ■ India ■ Myanmar</p>
Source: Estimated from the data available from Direction of Trade Statistics, IMF, June 2014	

Future Potential Areas of Trade and Investment

Geographically BCIM comprises contiguous region, hence, there is a huge areas of trade and investment potential for energy, transport, people-to-people, social and cultural connectivity and these are briefly described below:

Energy

Energy requirement is increasing day by day. The member countries are concerned about the need and sources of energy. BCIM region is endowed with huge natural resources namely offshore gas and oil. Therefore, there are enormous scopes

for energy cooperation in gas, oil, and hydroelectricity through energy trade and regional energy grids among the member countries.

Connectivity

Multi modal Connectivity through road, rail and air remains as the most focused area for enhancing regional economic cooperation. If the BCIM-EC comes into reality, the intra BCIM trade volume would increase in many folds. This would also attract investment of considerable figure.

Poverty Alleviation and Social Infrastructure

Poverty is a common problem for the member countries. It is expected that due to improved connectivity and infrastructure development there will be acceleration in growth rate. This would help to reduce poverty and improve living standard of the people. Cooperation in different areas such as agriculture, fisheries would help to alleviate poverty within BCIM region.

People to People Connectivity and Tourism

When there is mobility, there will be connectivity among the people, business and services. Cooperation and exchange in several areas such as education, technology, culture, health care, sports and academic studies would certainly facilitate people-to-people connectivity. Besides, cooperation in tourism industries, exploring tourism potential, and creating a BCIM Tourist Zone are essential for increasing more people to people contact.

Cooperation on Technology, Telecommunication, Climate Change and Human Resource Development (HRD)

From 2000 to 2009, 85 percent natural disaster took place only in Asia and the Pacific. This is alarming. That's the reason; climate change is a great concern for BCIM region. One of most vulnerable countries in this region is Bangladesh. Keeping in mind the extent and magnitude of the problem, a coordinated approach is required for the South Asian states to handle the future climate induced concerns. Besides, cooperation in the fields of technology, telecommunication and human resource development could be instrumental in expediting the pace of growth in the region that could ensure higher standard of living for the people.

BCIM-EC Initiative- Economic Prospect for Bangladesh

The opportunities which Bangladesh could tap from BCIM-EC connectivity are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Opportunities of Earning through Transit/Transshipment/Corridor

Under the BCIM-EC framework Bangladesh will allow Indian transport to move through road corridor from mainland India to the Indian north-eastern states. India was perusing these facilities in the form of transit. Besides, Kunming will be also connected with India with this corridor.

Bangladesh would earn about US\$ 98 million annually during first five years when facilities are being created along the identified transit corridors. Once the projects on infrastructures and facilities are completed, the country would earn more than US\$ 2 billion annually from the 6th year onwards. From 11th year of the discounted period, the annual earnings would reach US\$ 3 billion and would ultimately end up at US\$ 5.9 billion. (Yunus M. 2014)

Scope of Earning Through Existing Port Facilities

Being a small country, Bangladesh is fortunate to have two sea ports. One is located at Chittagong and the other one is in Mongla. Currently Chittagong has 40% spare capacity and Mongla port has 80% spare capacity. With the minimum investment, container handling capacity of both the port can be increased significantly. Thereby with all these potentials, Chittagong and Mongla port could be used to its fullest capacity (Hossain 2014).

Future Prospect of DSP at Sonadia

Bangladesh is desperately thinking to establish a DSP at Sonadia, 100 km South of Chittagong. The purpose is to meet the growing demand for national and international trade. This will serve as regional hub for land locked NE part of India, Yunnan province of China and for countries like Nepal and Bhutan .After the completion of DSP the present volume of 30 billion US\$ export-import business will be doubled (http://www.banglapedia.org/HT/S_0187.htm). Thus DSP will play a vital role for the economic development of Bangladesh integrating BCIM region.

Map 4: Sonadia DSP



Source:<http://www.google.com.bd/>

Trade and Investment Opportunities for Bangladesh

Trade Potentials for Bangladesh

All the members of BCIM EC enjoy tariff concessions for various commodities under different RTA. Bangladesh would be benefitted if the various NTB and other obstacles are removed. Finally, preferential market access under BCIM-EC would definitely enhance the trade opportunities for Bangladesh (Hossain 2014).

Investment Potentials for Bangladesh from BCIM-EC

With the establishment of BCIM-EC, the probable potentials for Bangladesh are discussed below.

Attract FDI in Infrastructure Development

BCIM-EC is designed to expand trade and investment through physical connectivity. Accordingly Bangladesh needs to develop its infrastructures like rail and road network along the corridor, improve the efficiency of Chittagong port, and establish new DSP at Sonadia, Chittagong. Bangladesh would require huge investment in this regard.

Bangladesh can invite FDI, may be from China, India or from any another developing partner like Asian Development Bank (ADB), European Union (EU) or recently established Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

By Establishing Special Economic Zone

Setting up of Industrial Zones or Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in different strategic locations along the corridor would significantly benefit Bangladesh. It will have two fold effect. Firstly, it will lead to industrial transfer, boosting industries such as processing and manufacturing. Secondly, as labor costs rises in China, labor-intensive industries such as garments and agro processing will eventually be shifted out of China to new regions with lower labor costs.

State of Energy Situation and Prospect for Bangladesh

Bangladesh is facing electric energy crisis since independence. But over the period, the gap between demand and supply has reduced significantly with forceful drive of the government. Demand of power is increasing day by day. Maximum power generation in 2014 is about 7500 MW against demand of about 13500 MW. Bangladesh Government has taken number of steps to produce 20000 MW by year 2021(www.gcmplc.com/power-crisis). Bangladesh has limited domestic commercial energy resources to produce electricity. Beside existing bilateral energy cooperation, Bangladesh might take the opportunities of regional framework under BCIM-EC enhance necessary energy capacity.

Scope for Bangladesh to Alleviation Poverty

One of the objectives of forming regional cooperation of BCIM-EC is Poverty Alleviation. It can be achieved through Infrastructural development which will facilitate trade and investment in the region. And it is expected that BCIM EC will bring significant investment in Bangladesh. This will have far reaching effect on the livelihood of the people of Bangladesh. Poverty alleviation is also the integral part of social and human development. Inflow of economic services and subsequent investment to sustain and enhance these services covers, among others, the area of social and human development as well as poverty alleviation.

Opportunities for Bangladesh Through People-to-People Contact

In all the BCIM forum people-to-people connectivity was given priority. From Bangladesh perspective, different forms of personnel exchanges within the BCIM

regions had been existing and now it has increased significantly. People to people connectivity will bring the people of this area more closer. It will help to develop the tourism sector where Bangladesh can derive significant benefit.

BCIM DRIVEN SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: POLITICAL AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REGION

Long Prevailing Political Discomfort

Inter-state relations among the member countries of BCIM-EC are not always smooth and devoid of irritants. Due to international and regional geo-political settings and outstanding bilateral issues, bilateral relations among the BCIM member countries impact their cooperative efforts. Bangladesh and India has their respective outstanding issues, while India and China as the two rising powers often engage in strategic competitions both within the region and beyond. Myanmar, being a closed nation for decades has limited interactions with India and Bangladesh. This state of inter-state relations in the BCIM region germinates political discomfort among the member countries often constraining their open-hearted initiative for regional integration in the contiguous region. These inter-state relations are briefly discussed below:

China-India Strategic Competition (Security, Diplomatic and Commercial Rivalries)

China and India remain always competitive, on both political and economic fronts. China's rapid expansion in the global economy is a great concern for India. In recent times, tensions between the two countries increased due to the border dispute. It can be mentioned that territorial dispute has always been a major source of debate between the two countries. This discomfort has the potential to cloud India-China cooperation for opening up their border to transport connectivity.

India-Myanmar Relations

The relationship between India and Myanmar is not consistent. The border issues between India-Myanmar relations always bring diplomatic row between the two countries. Besides, India believes that the clashes between Muslims and Buddhists in the Rakhine State have spillover effect in India as it would bring security concern of the latter.

Bangladesh-India and Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations

Between Bangladesh and India, the burning issues like management of porous border, border killing and water issues have always been impinging on the relationship. But during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent two-day visit to Bangladesh, India and Bangladesh seemed to have moved on to opening a new chapter in developing closer economic cooperation to bilateral trade, improving regional connectivity and energy cooperation. The two countries have signed 22 agreements to link their economies and walk together down the path of development.

On the contrary, Bangladesh's relations with Myanmar could not reach at significant level and the relationship quite often become lukewarm and sticky due to the influx of large number of refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh. These bilateral irritants of the BCIM member countries have the potential to offset their cooperative efforts.

Potential of BCIM Forum to Ease up Political Discomfort and Security Issues

To have sustainable political and secured environment, cooperation in the following fields are also essential:

Cooperation in the Field of Climate Change

The cooperation in combating climate change could bring huge economic and social benefits for all the member countries of BCIM-EC. This should be one of the main political commitments of two power houses. Both India and China are in search of renewable source of energy as it will reduce their burden of importing large resources of oil, natural gas and coal and will also reduce their carbon emission without hurting their growth.

Cooperation in the Field of Disaster Management

Natural disasters will continue to require greater regional cooperation and demand more resources. Member Nations must commit greater resources to capacity development and enlist the cooperation of the whole of society to mitigate economic and human impacts of natural disasters. In this regard, members of BCIM-EC have significant political commitment and roles to play in advancing disaster cooperation in the South and South East Asian region.

Developing Strong Trustworthy Regional Security Organization

International security threats are more complex and diverse today. To effectively meet various security threats, BCIM countries may uphold the new security concept featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination seeking integrated security, common security and cooperation-based security. This can be achieved through regional security organization and by sharing data and information.

POLICY OPTIONS TO MEET THE CHALLENGES IN FOSTERING ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SECURITY DEVELOPMENT

Major Challenges for the Region

The idea of having BCIM-EC is definitely need of the time but not free from problems and challenges. Some of such issues are:

Lack of Trust and Confidence

Even though the two power houses, China and India are trying to come closer but there remains some unresolved problems. Some are like border demarcation, fear of containment and counter containment on advantage and disadvantage of being connected with the economic corridor and trust deficit between India and China.

Financing the Projects

For Infrastructural development especially in Bangladesh and in Myanmar, finance is one of the major concerns. In this regard, public-private partnership (PPP) options should be explored. Support from development partners and international financial institutions (IFIs) like Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank (WB) can be catered for. Chinese proposed AIIB could also be one of the major sources of financing the project.

Poor Infrastructure and Transport System

Infrastructure and connectivity are core elements of trade facilitation. To establish and simulate deeper integration among the aspiring members of BCIM-EC, a

good infrastructure and excellent connectivity are very essential. Although China and India by and large have better infrastructure facility compared to other two countries (Moazzem 2015). Lack of proper infrastructure facility and transport system are one of the barriers to the improvement of trade and investment in the region. In the present scenario, BCIM remains as one of the least connected regions in the world (Rahman 2014)

Tariff Barriers

A highly differentiated tariff rates are currently in operation in BCIM countries. Wide tariff differentials are observed between different categories of products in different countries which range between as low as 0.9 per cent for Bangladeshi's capital goods imported to China to as high as 19.8 per cent for Chinese consumer goods exported to Bangladesh. Tariffs are relatively high in Bangladesh and India in all categories of products (Moazzem, K G, Bashak K K and Raj S 2014).

Non-tariff Barriers

Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) including SPS and TBTs widely prevail in case of bilateral trade in BCIM region. These NTMs include certification requirements, labeling, marking and packaging requirements, traceability requirements, tolerance limits for residue and contaminants of restricted use of certain substances and are possible obstacles for growth of bilateral trade in the region once the BCIM-EC in operation. (Moazzem, K G, Bashak K K and Raj S 2014)

RECOMMENDED POLICY OPTIONS

Political Will of the Member Countries

Political will is the first pre requisite and leaders must have the will for materialising the BCIM-EC. Here, mutual visits by high level leaders can play very vital role in resolving suspicion and misperception about each other. The stake holders can also have sustainable dialogue, especially on security issues for reducing trust deficit.

Reducing Trade Imbalance

Trade imbalance among members of BCIM-EC can be reduced by removing all non-tariff barriers to trade. Harmonisation of standards, tariff structure, and dismantling of all para-tariff and non-tariff barriers are key to this.

Supportive Policies to Promote Investment

Non-reciprocal market access facilities, incentives for investors willing to invest in weaker economies and other supportive policies must be put in place to promote investment within the region. The major focus of BCIM initiative should be to develop the growth zone that is in a relatively underdeveloped area. Attracting investments, both from within and also from outside, to exploit the complementarities of the sub-region, through horizontal and vertical cooperation, should be at the centre of the design of BCIM cooperation.

Establishing Special Economic Zones along the BCIM-EC

Bangladesh needs to establish special economic zone and develop special infrastructure facility to attract fresh investment. It is important note that such a corridor could attract both intra regional FDI. Government needs to consider setting up industrial zones in different strategic locations which could exploit potentials of new connectivity within the region. The potentials for establishing power generation plants in the BCIM-EC needs to be realized which could supply necessary electricity to those economic zones. (Moazzem et al 2014)

Allowing Bangladeshi Investors to Invest in BCIM-EC Region

There are potential sectors in the BCIM-EC where Bangladeshi entrepreneurs would be interested to invest. Bangladesh could invest in Yanan's hydropower projects and could re-export the generated electricity through regional energy grid via Myanmar and India for the special economic zones. Bangladeshi investors may like to invest in small scale energy projects in Myanmar. In this context, development of regional energy grid and harmonization of energy pricing at regional level would be important.

CONCLUSION

BCIM countries hope to create a corridor that would combine road, rail, water and air linkages in the region which would facilitate cross border flow of people, goods minimize overland trade obstacles, ensure greater market access and increase trade .This will bring new economic opportunities and benefits for all the members of BCIM-EC. A number of meetings have been held including a study group setup to concretize the concept of the BCIM-EC

The Yunan province of China is a landlocked area. This is relatively poor and backward which needs to be developed. Similarly India's landlocked north east region has lagged behind compared to other parts of the country. BCIM, through its economic corridor and connectivity could facilitate China and India to give access to the sea through Bangladesh and Myanmar. This would generate economic development in the region. The corridor, it was agreed, will run from Kunming to Kolkata, linking Mandalay in Myanmar as well as Dhaka and Chittagong in Bangladesh. But the physical connectivity seems to be the main critical challenge to initiate the process given the poor state of infrastructures, roads and highways, particularly in the Indian north east connecting Bangladesh and Myanmar. It would require careful and detailed planning involving infrastructure development, improving the transport linkages and mobilization of funds for the implementation of the projects.

There are other notable political and security issues. Trust deficit among the member countries is a major concern. Border dispute, insurgent activities, ethnic tension may slow down the initiative. These aspects need to be addressed by respective member countries. The member countries should ease up the tariff and non tariff barriers. They should make the investment friendly policy and remove the complicated trans border movement policy of man and material. Above all the political will is the main vehicle to take this initiative forward.

Bangladesh is located at the heart of BCIM-EC. There are many scopes for this blessed country to utilize its geographical location as a leverage to gain economically, politically in bi-laterally as well as regionally. It has the potentials to become regional economic hub. Besides, Economic and infrastructure development will generate employment in the country which will contribute in eradication of poverty at the same time will ensure security.

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