

**Third Meeting of the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group**

08 December 2020, New Delhi, India (Virtual)

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- Her Excellency **Ms. Riva Ganguly Das**, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India;
- Heads of Delegation of Member States;
- Representatives of Asian Development Bank (ADB)
- Distinguished Delegates;
- Ladies & Gentlemen: ***Good Morning!***

It is a great privilege and honor for me to address the Third Meeting of the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group (BTCWG), which is being held today during the challenging time of COVID-19 Pandemic.

To begin with, on behalf of the Secretariat and on my own behalf, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Government of India for leading the Transport and Communication sector and hosting this 3<sup>rd</sup> BTCWG meeting today.

We would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to ADB who has been working very closely with the Secretariat since 2006. ADB has been very accommodating and supportive in ensuring that this Master Plan is developed to the satisfaction of all Member States. A lot of changes were incorporated and revisions made to the document as desired by the Member States and that took a considerable amount of time. For this, we would once again like to thank ADB for bearing with us.

Our heartfelt gratitude also goes to Thailand who actually developed the first Concept Paper of the Master Plan for Transport and Connectivity.

## **Distinguished Delegates,**

We all know that transport and transport connectivity is the most fundamental requirement of any regional integration process. A well-established transport network is a prerequisite to reap the benefits of a free trade area, promote trade and investment and enhance cooperation in areas such as tourism, people-to-people contact and cultural exchanges. For this very reason, transport and communication was included as one of the initial areas of cooperation when BIMSTEC was first established, more than 20 years ago.

Recognizing the fact that connectivity is vital in promoting regional integration, the Leaders of the BIMSTEC Member States during their Goa Retreat in October 2016, directed the preparation of a Master Plan for BIMSTEC connectivity.

Accordingly, the 15<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting held in Kathmandu in August 2017, gave the mandate to BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group to develop the draft Master Plan. And realizing that the master plan would be critical not only for regional and economic integration but also as a strategic document to guide actions in promoting synergy with other connectivity frameworks, the leaders during their 4<sup>th</sup> Summit called for its early adoption. Since then, the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity has been in development.

## **Honourable Delegates,**

Kindly allow me to give a brief background of the process that the Master plan went through. I feel this might help the members in your deliberation today especially if some members are new:

-Thailand prepared the first concept paper and it was discussed in Kathmandu in August 2017.

-Picking up from here, BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group entrusted ADB to draft a Master Plan for Transport Connectivity in November 2017.

-The Secretariat in June 2018, received the **First Draft** of the BIMSTEC Master Plan from ADB and circulated to Member States for comments and observations.

-Subsequently, after incorporating the comments from Member States, ADB submitted the **Second Draft** of the BIMSTEC Master Plan in August 2018.

-Taking further comments and suggestions from the Member States, ADB produced the **Final Draft** of the BIMSTEC Master Plan in August 2019.

-And in July 2020, the **Second Final Draft of the Master Plan** was completed and produced after including additional comments from the Member States.

-Incorporating further comments from all the Member States, a **Revised Final Draft** of the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity was developed which has '**in principle**' been **approved** by all the Member States. And this document (the revised Master Plan) was circulated in October 2020 to be **discussed** and **finalized** today in the 3<sup>rd</sup> BTCWG Meeting.

### **Excellency, ladies and gentlemen**

As is evident from the above timeline, the preparations and processes of finalizing the Master Plan document has been going on for the last three years. ADB and their consultants have travelled to all Member States and met with relevant Ministries, agencies and focal persons and included their comments and suggestions in the plan.

**Esteemed Delegates**, this Master Plan is a 10-year strategy and action plan document that was supposed to have started implementation in 2018 and complete in 2028. We are now in 2020 which means we have already lost two years and any further delay may affect the relevancy of the Master Plan.

The importance and significance of this Master plan has been clearly underlined by our Leaders in the two Summits in Goa and Kathmandu. Its urgency for finalization and adoption has been emphasized by the Leaders. Therefore, we are hopeful that the distinguished delegates of this 3<sup>rd</sup> BTCWG will note the urgency of this document while deliberating today.

**Distinguished Delegates,**

Before I conclude, I would like to submit that the Secretariat has tried its best to circulate and provide all the background papers for the Meeting today. We hope the delegates got adequate time to go through. The Secretariat would also like to assure the esteemed delegates of our full support in their deliberations during the course of the Meeting today.

Once again, on behalf of all my colleagues in the Secretariat and on my own behalf I would like to express our appreciation to Your Excellency Ms. Riva Ganguly Das for your presence today. I would also like to thank all the participants from the Member States for your cooperation and for bringing this Master Plan this far. With this few remarks, I wish you a successful deliberation in finalizing the Master Plan.

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