



Government of Nepal
National Planning Commission Secretariat
Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal

VC Dr. Shrestha attends High Level Dialogue on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Bangkok

Press Statement

A high level delegation led by the Vice Chairman of the National Planning Commission Hon'ble Dr. Min Bahadur Shrestha attended the High Level Dialogue on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration held in Bangkok, Thailand on May 18, 2017. Ministers, high-level officials and experts representing 33 countries of Asia and the Pacific participated in the programme.

The objective of the Dialogue was to discuss how the region can effectively pursue Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration (RECI) to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. The Dialogue emphasized that RECI and the 2030 Agenda are mutually reinforcing processes and have to be pursued in a way that they support each other.

Speaking at the programme VC Dr. Shrestha said that the Belt and Road initiative could help turn the vision of seamless connectivity in the Asia and the Pacific region. He said that the Belt and Road Initiative proposed by the People's Republic of China could work as a significant step toward increasing the connectivity in the region.

"In fact turning the vision of seamless connectivity in to reality in the areas of transport, energy and ICT is the most important starting point for regional cooperation and integration which can open the door for opportunities," Shrestha said.

He stressed enhancing market integration reducing non-tariff barriers, reaching multilateral agreements, streamlining regulatory frameworks and agreeing on common standards among the countries in the region.

Shrestha said that strengthening regional financial cooperation was necessary particularly to improve regional economic surveillance and crisis management capacity; deepen financial markets; and deliver innovative financing solutions to support sustainable infrastructure development.



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Regional economic cooperation and integration could bring about enormous opportunities for increasing income and employment and eventually contribute to achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular transboundary goals, he said.

At the same time, SDGs can help in guiding an effective pursuit of RECI, for instance, by ensuring that infrastructure projects have favorable social and environmental, as well as economic, impacts, he added.

Participants discussed the main challenges and articulated suggestions to move forward, keeping in view the four pillars identified in the Bangkok Declaration adopted at the First Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration (RECI) in December 2013.

Shrestha had left for Bangkok on Tuesday leading a high-level Nepali delegation. The delegation includes Secretary at the National Planning Commission Secretariat Mr. Bishnu Prasad Lamsal and Joint Secretary Lal Shankar Ghimire, among others.

Kathmandu

May 18, 2017

Tulasi Prasad Gautam
Spokesperson

Note: Talking Points of Hon'ble Dr. Min Bahadur Shrestha, Chair of the High Level Dialogue on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration, and points of Intervention by Mr. Lal Shankar Ghimire, Joint Secretary of the NPC is attached separately.

Talking Points of Hon'ble Dr. Min Bahadur Shrestha, Chair of the High Level Dialogue on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration held from 20-21 April 2017 and the Panelist of High-level Dialogue on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

9am-12noon, 18 May 2017, ESCAP Hall, Bangkok

Madame Executive Secretary of UNESCAP and Moderator of this panel session, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen!

A very good morning to all of you.

1. We all agree that regional economic cooperation and integration can increase productivity and prosperity in the region. In addition, it can also facilitate innovation.
2. Historical evidences show that this region used to lead the world innovation. For example, paper, paper currency notes and gun powder were invented in this region. Flying aircraft *Puspakbiman* and weapons like *Brahmastra* were imagined first in this region long ago. Later innovation moved to the west and now has become unipolar. Regional economic cooperation and integration may contribute to bringing back innovation to the east, which can make it from unipolar to bipolar or multipolar benefitting not only the region but the entire world.
3. We all understand that everyone can benefit from regional cooperation and integration. But the question is how to implement it, how to achieve it. In this connection, ESCAP organized a High-level Dialogue on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific, on 20 and 21 April 2017. The Dialogue was attended by ministers, high-level officials and experts representing 33 countries of Asia and the Pacific. I had the privilege of Chairing the Dialogue.
4. The objective of the Dialogue was to discuss how the region can effectively pursue Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration (RECI) to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.
5. Participants emphasized that RECI and the 2030 Agenda are mutually reinforcing processes and have to be pursued in a way that they support each other.
6. Participants discussed the main challenges and articulated suggestions to move forward, keeping in view the four pillars identified in the Bangkok Declaration adopted at the First Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration (RECI) in December 2013. These pillars are: seamless

connectivity, market integration, financial cooperation and addressing shared vulnerabilities and risks.

- a. In fact **turning the vision of seamless connectivity in to reality** in the areas of transport, energy and ICT is the most important starting point for regional cooperation and integration which can open the door for opportunities. The '**Belt and Road**' initiative proposed by the People's Republic of China can work as a significant step toward increasing the connectivity in the region.
 - b. **Enhancing market integration** requires reducing non-tariff barriers, reaching multilateral agreements, streamlining regulatory frameworks and agreeing on common standards.
 - c. **Strengthening regional financial cooperation** is necessary particularly to improve regional economic surveillance and crisis management capacity; deepen financial markets; and deliver innovative financing solutions to support sustainable infrastructure development.
 - d. **Addressing shared vulnerabilities and risks** mainly include talking collaborative steps to deal with challenges created by natural and human induced disasters, food insecurity and climate change.
7. Regional economic cooperation and integration can bring about enormous opportunities for increasing income and employment and eventually contribute to achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular transboundary goals. At the same time, SDGs can help in guiding an effective pursuit of RECI, for instance, by ensuring that infrastructure projects have favorable social and environmental, as well as economic, impacts.
 8. Those were the matters deliberated, discussed and recommendations made during the Dialogue. These recommendations need to be sincerely implemented to get countries in the Asia and the Pacific benefitted.
 9. If we look at the regional cooperation and integration initiatives in the South Asia region, SAARC has been there for more than three decades. Some significant efforts have been made. Still the progress has been very slow. To increase the road and energy connectivity, BBIN initiative has been proposed, which covers four countries out of the eight members. Going from regional to sub-regional and sub-sub regional initiatives indicate that broader umbrella needs to be made more effective. We hope to find some solution to address this challenge in the days to come.

With these observations, I stop here. Thank you for listening.

Points of Intervention by Mr. Lal Shanker Ghimire, Joint Secretary of the National Planning Commission during High Level Dialogue on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration held from 20-21 April 2017 and the Panelist of High-level Dialogue on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

9am-12noon, 18 May 2017, ESCAP Hall, Bangkok

1. Thank you Madame Moderator.
2. First, the Nepalese delegation would like to thank all distinguished panelists for their insightful expressions and views on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration.
3. Yes, my delegation agree with what has come out. Again, the delegation decided to make brief intervention. And, the intervention will focus on implementation of the RECI.
4. In other words, *as it was indicated by some panelists*, that the implementation is very very important for moving forward the RECI agenda in an effective way.
5. However, for taking this agenda further in an effective way, we may need to look at from two perspectives; the regional and sub-regional.
6. Equally important aspect is to look at RECI from the mainstreaming perspective, that is, how this is going to be mainstreaming with the countries' SDGs agenda and the national plan or development agenda of the countries, how this is going to be mainstreamed with the sub-regional agendas, with the regional agendas and also how this will be taken further to get benefit from beyond the region.
7. The aspect of mainstreaming needs to be seen from the capacity perspective as well. The countries have to have capacity. However, say be it for trade facilitation or protecting against vulnerabilities or enhancing the financial cooperation, many countries especially LLDCs, LDCs and SIDs of our region lack capacity.
8. In this context, my delegation would like to strongly urge UNESCAP, because I can see comparative advantages of UNESCAP or being UNESCAP seated in Asia and the Pacific, and through this platform to all development partners and other regional as well as international organizations to help countries get their capacity developed.
9. Finally, my delegation would suggest a ministerial meeting on RECI to get the highest level of commitment from countries in our region.
10. With this I stop and thank you Madame Moderator once again for giving an opportunity to speak on behalf of Nepal and on behalf of our delegation.