

**FICCI and India Foundation to organize first-ever international conclave  
on BIMSTEC to be held in Guwahati from November 2 to 4, 2017**  
*MoS Civil Aviation releases official brochure and website of BIMSTEC conference*

**NEW DELHI, 7 June 2017: Mr. Jayant Sinha, Minister of State for Civil Aviation, Government of India,** released on Tuesday the official brochure and website of the BIMSTEC conference, the first-ever international conclave on BIMSTEC to be organized by FICCI in collaboration with India Foundation from November 2 to 4, 2017, in Guwahati under the overarching theme of 'BIMSTEC: An Enabling Architecture for Growth, Prosperity and Partnerships'.

The conclave aims to engage the Member States of BIMSTEC on the same platform and collectively streamline a vision for the future. High level delegations from all the Member States of BIMSTEC comprising key dignitaries and policy makers from the government, industry players and academicians are expected to participate. Effective exchange of ideas, success stories and knowledge transfer on developmental issues such as sustainable development goals, trade and investment, skills development and capacity building, arts and culture would enable the process of regional engagement in BIMSTEC easier. This regional conference would strengthen the people to people connectivity, partnerships among businesses and economic engagement among the Member States in BIMSTEC. The conference will act as a prelude to the Regional Summit, expected to be scheduled in Nepal where all the Member States of BIMSTEC hopefully would endorse the Policy Paper.

As a prelude to the conference and on the occasion of 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of BIMSTEC, FICCI and India Foundation organised a curtain raiser of the conference.

Addressing the curtain raiser, Mr. Sinha said that to strengthen trade, connectivity was vital to develop linkages. Therefore, the focus was on developing transport infrastructure, which included rail and roadways, waterways and aviation. India was developing its railways and roadways network and was linking the northeast with the rest of India as it was the hub for reaching out to the neighbouring countries.

To encourage high value travellers and allow free movement for businesspersons, Mr. Sinha said that there should be an open skies policy in BIMSTEC on the lines of SAARC agreement. He added that besides creating an aviation network, there was a need to enhance land and water connectivity between BIMSTEC for hassle-free movement of goods and services.

A message from **Mr. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, on the occasion of Twentieth Anniversary of BIMSTEC,** read "BIMSTEC not only connects South and South-East Asia, but also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal. With shared values, histories, ways of life and destinies that are interlinked, BIMSTEC represents a common space for peace and development. For India, it is a natural platform to fulfil our key foreign policy priorities of 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East'."

Earlier in the day at the FICCI's Core Group of Experts on BIMSTEC, **Mr. Prashant Agrawal, Joint Secretary (BIMSTEC & SAARC), MEA**, said that BIMSTEC had identified 14 key sectors and India would lead the group in transportation & communication; tourism; environment and disaster management; and counter-terrorism and transnational crime.

Mr. Agarwal said that India's Northeast is located at the centre of the BIMSTEC region and its development and connectivity must be linked with that of its neighbours in the east and west. He added that the possibility of concluding a BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement and Coastal Shipping agreement was being explored besides the signing of an appropriate FTA in the sub-regional grouping.

**Amb. Rajiv Bhatia, Chair of FICCI's Core Group of Experts on BIMSTEC**, said that the formation of FICCI's Core Group of Experts on BIMSTEC was essential to drive the right discourse in the grouping. The fundamental goal of the Core Group should be to synthesize knowledge and wisdom of eminent members of the Indian industry and thought leaders which are a part of this Core Group; to deploy this knowledge for the practical use of the industry, policymakers and public opinion at large; and to utilize it also for deepening India's key economic engagements with BIMSTEC Member States.

Eventually, the Outcome Document or the Policy Paper which the Core group intends to generate should be able to address the basic challenges being confronted by BIMSTEC be it on trade or investment or doing business or sustainable development goals or even capacity building. The document should also be able to clearly list out actionable recommendations especially from the industry's end and define the role of each stakeholder or agency of BIMSTEC in driving the developmental agenda ahead.

**Mr. Harshvardhan Neotia, Immediate Past President FICCI & Chairperson, Ambuja Neotia Group**, said that FICCI has formed a Core Group of Experts on BIMSTEC comprising key thought leaders from the industry and think tanks to chart out a Policy Paper underlining a comprehensive and doable vision for the next 10 years in BIMSTEC in order to promote trade, investments and business partnerships among the Member States. He invited all the partners to help make BIMSTEC a vibrant regional bloc. The time has come for BIMSTEC to emerge as the next success story of Asia in years to come, he added.

**Dr. Jyotsna Suri, Past President FICCI & Chairperson & Managing Director, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group**, said that BIMSTEC is the pivot of emerging Indo-Pacific. The geographical contiguity of BIMSTEC Member States, their abundant natural and human resources, rich historical linkages and shared cultural heritage provide the sub-grouping the ideal platform to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the Bay of Bengal region. There lies immense untapped economic potential in the sub-regional grouping. The BIMSTEC conference, in this regard, would be an important milestone in shaping the future course in the regional sub-grouping, she added.

**Mr. Vikramjit Singh Sahney, Co-Chair of FICCI's Core Group of Experts on BIMSTEC,** said that the levels of intra-regional trade in BIMSTEC was quite low and the Core Group should be able to determine ways and means of promoting businesses in the region. He also reiterated the key mandate of the Core Group on BIMSTEC - to assess the present state of BIMSTEC and provide inputs, based on a comprehensive understanding, for charting out the future course of BIMSTEC in the medium and long run and recommend, if required, the necessary improvements required in the existing mechanisms; spell out a comprehensive and doable vision for the next 10 years in BIMSTEC; facilitate the creation of sustainable model for businesses to thrive in BIMSTEC, largely by identifying and promoting growing business opportunities in the grouping and understanding concerns and critical issues that impact business decision making for engaging with BIMSTEC countries; identify policy gaps and enablers to facilitate deeper engagement among the regional players.

The Core Group could suggest feasible ways in which the grouping could play a greater and effective role in strengthening sub-regional cooperation; and design a set of policy recommendations underlining the necessary improvements in existing BIMSTEC mechanisms, including strengthening of BIMSTEC Secretariat for effective monitoring, evaluation and implementation.

**Capt. Alok Bansal, Director, India Foundation,** said that connectivity was the key to augment trade and investment among BIMSTEC. For regional cooperation it was imperative to establish an enabling ecosystem to encourage trade and investment and movement of people.

**FICCI MEDIA DIVISION**