



Two Day meeting on “Strengthening Railway Transport Connectivity in South and South West Asia” Commences in New Delhi

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“Rail Connectivity in South and South East Asia is priority”: Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu

A two day meeting on “Strengthening Railway Transport Connectivity in South and South West Asia” was organised by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in coordination with Organization for Cooperation between Railways (OSJD) and Ministry of Railways, Government of India in New Delhi on 15th – 16th March 2017. Discussions were held to strengthen the rail transport and provide connectivity to the countries in South Asia and South East Asia. Shri Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu, Hon’ble Minister of Railways Government of India. Representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Iran, India, Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Turkey and other countries were also present.

The meeting sought to review and identify innovative measures to strengthen cross-border railway transport within South and South-West Asia; which is one of the least connected and integrated sub regions in the world despite its vast contiguous landmass. Strengthening railway connectivity is central to boosting economic growth, enhancing trade and transport connectivity and improving lives in the sub region. The meeting brought together government officials and policy makers from nine countries in South Asia and South-West Asia and Central Asia, along with representatives from various international and regional organizations, railway and connectivity experts and academia, as well as the private sector (see tentative programme attached).

Speaking on the occasion, Shri Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu said “Connectivity and integration of trade gives huge growth, it is interesting to see how we can participate in this process. Physical connectivity is required for market integration and Railways can transport huge capacity as compared to other modes of transport. South Asia is most populous and when goods and services will grow, GDP will also grow in this region. Therefore, idea is to bring rail connectivity in South Asia which will be beneficial for the economy. Our priority is to develop connectivity between Kathmandu and New Delhi, Kolkata & Kathmandu. We are exploring the connectivity between India, Myanmar, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Connectivity between the countries in South Asia and South East Asia will be helpful for poverty alleviation and economy in this region. We require cooperation of the partner countries. The international rail transport proposals of ESCAP under the Trans-Asian Railway network assumes special significant in this context. Of particular importance is the proposal of an Istanbul to Dhaka rail route, also known as the ITI-DKD rail corridor. India hosts an important segment of this rail route. The most important feature of this proposal is that while this main rail corridor traverses the length of Southern Asia, it offers multimodal linkages with neighbouring sub regions, particularly catering to the transit requirements of landlocked countries of our neighbourhood.”

Mr. Matthew Hammill, Officer in Charge, ESCAP South & South West Asia office (ESCAP-SSWA) in his opening remarks stressed on taking initiatives for operationalizing the Trans Asian Railway Network and how Indian Railways can contribute in this process in South Asia. During the session, the other speakers were Shri Mohd Jamshed, Member Traffic, Railway Board, Government of India, Shri Tadeusz Szozda, Chairman, Organisation for Co operation between Railways (OSJD) Committee.

The representatives from SAARC Secretariat, BIMSTEC, NITI Aayog (Government of India), CONCOR (Ministry of Railways, Government of India) also spoke on the occasion.

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