ESCAP-NICCI National Capacity Building Workshop on Enhancing Connectivity of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) through Advancing Sustainable Transport Corridors

May 21, 2026

Kathmandu Marriott Hotel, Naxal, Kathmandu

PREPARED FOR THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC UN-ESCAP

By Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce & Industry

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FOREWORD

A Message from Leadership

It is a matter of great pride for the Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry to have co-organized this National Capacity Building Workshop alongside the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. Held on 21 May 2026 at the Kathmandu Marriott Hotel, the workshop brought together policymakers, international experts, academics, and private sector leaders to discuss how Nepal can build transport corridors that are efficient, sustainable, inclusive, and future-ready.

Nepal occupies a unique geographic position between two of the world's largest economies. With the right infrastructure, institutions, and political will, Nepal can transition from being a landlocked country to a truly land-linked one — an active participant in the regional trade architecture rather than merely a transit route.

I wish to record NICCI's deep appreciation to Mr. Edouard Chong and the UNESCAP Transport Division for their partnership in making this event possible. Mr. Chong's personal commitment to Nepal's connectivity agenda has been invaluable, and UNESCAP's expertise and convening power greatly strengthened the quality and impact of this workshop. We look forward to continuing this collaboration in the years ahead.

My gratitude also extends to the Government of Nepal's Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies and the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport for their support and guidance. I also thank Joint Secretary Mr. Bhimarjun Adhikary and Joint Secretary Mr. Umesh Bindu Shrestha for their important opening and closing remarks.

To our distinguished presenters — Mr. Rajan Sharma, Professor Prabir De, Ms. Delgernasan Mishig, Mr. Madhu Marasani, and Mr. Alex Tran — thank you for your valuable insights and contributions, which enriched the discussions throughout the day.

NICCI's Trade and Transit Committee has long championed trade facilitation and corridor development as key priorities for Nepal's economic future. This workshop has produced practical recommendations that the Committee intends to pursue actively. We present this report to UNESCAP as both a record of the proceedings and a foundation for the work ahead.

SUNIL K.C.
President of NICCI

EVENT OVERVIEW

AT A GLANCE

This national capacity building workshop was jointly organized by NICCI and the UNESCAP Transport Division to examine how landlocked developing countries — Nepal in particular — can strengthen trade competitiveness and economic integration through sustainable, digitally enabled transport corridors. The event brought together government officials, international experts, academics, and private sector representatives to deliberate on actionable strategies across infrastructure investment, regulatory harmonization, green logistics, and cross-border digitalization.

Overview

- **Event Title:** ESCAP–NICCI National Capacity Building Workshop on Enhancing Connectivity of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) through Advancing Sustainable Transport Corridors
- **Date:** 21 May 2026
- **Time:** 9:30 AM onwards
- **Venue**: Kathmandu Marriott Hotel, Kathmandu, Nepal
- **Organizers**: Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NICCI) | United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) Transport Division

OPENING CEREMONY

OPENING REMARKS — MR. BHIMARJUN ADHIKARY

JOINT SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT, GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL

Joint Secretary Adhikary opened the workshop by outlining the Government of Nepal's infrastructure priorities, with particular emphasis on road development and trade facilitation. Key points included:

- The Kathmandu–Birgunj Fast Track is now in its implementation phase and will significantly reduce transit distances on one of Nepal's most commercially critical corridors.
- Trade and transport are interdependent systems — improving one without the other yields diminishing returns. The government has committed a substantial budget to this integrated approach.
- A shift toward multimodal transport is a strategic imperative. Nepal must think holistically about export logistics rather than optimizing individual links in isolation.
- Modernizing border infrastructure to achieve seamless movement of goods remains a central policy objective, including identifying and addressing infrastructure gaps at crossing points.
- The workshop was welcomed as an opportunity to move beyond theoretical proposals toward workable, implementation-ready solutions.

OPENING REMARKS — MR. GAURAV TAYAL

VICE PRESIDENT, NEPAL-INDIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (NICCI)

Mr. Tayal extended a formal welcome to all attendees and expressed NICCI's appreciation to UNESCAP and Mr. Edouard Chong for partnering with NICCI to convene the workshop. His remarks highlighted:

- The role of sustainable transport corridors in expanding Nepal's trade reach and bilateral connectivity.
- The recognition that physical infrastructure alone is insufficient without parallel investment in digital trade systems, electronic documentation, and streamlined cross-border procedures.
- The imperative to pursue green logistics and climate-resilient infrastructure — transport development must account for environmental responsibility.
- The importance of ensuring that the benefits of sustainable transport extend to workers and local communities along corridor routes.
- NICCI's firm commitment to a sustained working partnership with UNESCAP on transport and trade facilitation initiatives going forward.

OPENING REMARKS — MR. EDOUARD CHONG, TRANSPORT DIVISION, UNESCAP

Presentation Link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DKyJQugkjYc9Ah8YRaASsGekSMKf6sxU/view

Mr. Chong conveyed gratitude to NICCI and the relevant Government of Nepal ministries for hosting the event. His presentation outlined the work of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in promoting sustainable and resilient regional connectivity, particularly for Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs).

As one of the five UN Regional Commissions, UNESCAP supports regional cooperation, implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), research, capacity building, and intergovernmental collaboration across its 53 member states. Its Transport Division has been actively supporting logistics and transport capacity-building initiatives across Asia-Pacific through workshops, training programs, and technical cooperation.

A major focus of the presentation was UNESCAP's 2025–2027 regional project titled "Accelerating collective action in the third decade of the Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries (2024–2034)."

The initiative aims to strengthen sustainable transport corridors along the Asian Highway Network and improve seamless, resilient, and low-carbon connectivity for LLDCs, transit countries, and archipelagic nations.

Key activities include developing policy recommendations, promoting new technologies and operational efficiency, conducting research and stakeholder consultations, and organising regional and national capacity-building workshops in cities such as Kathmandu, Dushanbe, and Kunming.

The presentation also highlighted broader regional priorities, including the use of artificial intelligence and data-driven tools to strengthen transport connectivity, as well as efforts to improve the efficiency, resilience, and accessibility of port cities in Asia-Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Mr. Chong announced that the 5th ESCAP Ministerial Conference on Transport will be held in Bangkok in November 2026, continuing dialogue and cooperation on sustainable regional transport connectivity.

SESSION PROCEEDINGS & PRESENTATIONS

PRESENTATION 1: ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT CORRIDORS TO STRENGTHEN SEAMLESS CONNECTIVITY: APPLICATION OF THE REGIONAL FRAMEWORK WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF NEPAL

PRESENTER: MR. RAJAN SHARMA, EXPERT CONSULTANT, INDEPENDENT EXPERT

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Mr. Sharma's presentation applied UNESCAP's regional sustainable transport corridor framework to the Nepal context. The presentation addressed Nepal's specific infrastructure gaps and operational constraints alongside forward-looking strategic recommendations. Key discussion points arising from the Q&A included:

- Small freight forwarders require targeted government support to manage transition costs during the shift toward sustainable transport systems.
- Road transport heavily dominates the sector by carrying over 90% of freight movement. However, priority routes suffer from uneven infrastructure conditions, weak maintenance, and traffic growth that has completely outpaced design capacity.
- Corridor Time-Cost-Distance Metrics: A comparative transit analysis shows that the southern route from Kathmandu to Kolkata Port spans 700–900 km, takes 5–10 days, and incurs low-to-moderate relative costs. In comparison, northern routes face massive distance and system friction; the route to China's Tianjin Port covers 3,000–3,500 km, takes 15–25 days, incurs high relative costs, and loses up to 30–60% of its total transit time purely to border delays.
- Panelists recommended digital customs integration, extended border operating hours, and expanded dry port capacity as near-term, high-impact interventions.
- The government acknowledged existing maintenance deficits and infrastructure needs across key corridor segments.
- Discussions highlighted the importance of coordinated soft and hard infrastructure investment and stronger inter-ministerial alignment.
- Recent Initiatives and Policy Recommendations: Over the 2025/26 period, Nepal advanced key policy reforms, including Cabinet approval of a comprehensive national Logistics Policy, revisions to the Multimodal Transport Operator (MTO) Act, and expanded digitalization via ASYCUDA-based customs automation.
- Weak railway infrastructure was identified as a structural bottleneck, with calls for dedicated freight lines.
- The Ethiopia–Djibouti rail corridor was cited as a relevant international case study.
- Trade facilitation was recognized as a complex, multi-agency challenge extending well beyond customs administration.

PRESENTATION 2: ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT CORRIDORS FOR BHUTAN AND NEPAL: PAPERLESS TRADE, GREEN PORTS, AND SUSTAINABLE SHIPPING

PRESENTER: MR. PRABIR DE, PROFESSOR, RESEARCH AND INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (RIS), RIS, INDIA

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Mr. De situated Nepal and Bhutan within the global architecture of sustainable transport, drawing on shipping decarbonization frameworks, maritime trade dependencies, and regional treaty developments. Key takeaways included:

- Nepal and Bhutan face an estimated 40% additional transit cost burden attributable purely to their landlocked geography, with primary maritime access through Indian ports at Kolkata, Haldia, and Visakhapatnam, and Chattogram in Bangladesh.
- Nepal's scheduled LDC graduation in 2026 makes the development of sustainable transport corridors a time-sensitive economic priority.
- The Awaza Programme of Action (2024–2034) provides the global roadmap for modernizing LLDC connectivity, including digital broadband and cross-border energy infrastructure.
- Adoption of sustainable transport corridors is a voluntary, economically transformative choice supported by UN frameworks, not a binding obligation.
- Nepal's transport and energy transit currently rests on the 1999 India-Nepal Treaty of Transit, pacts with Bangladesh and China, and the 2023 Cross-Border Electricity Trade Agreement.
- The IMO's GHG Strategy targets net-zero maritime emissions by or around 2050, with tools including the Energy Efficiency Design Index (EEDI) and Carbon Intensity Indicator (CII) rating system.
- Accession to UNESCAP's Framework Agreement on Cross-Border Paperless Trade (UN CPTA) was recommended as a flexible mechanism for Nepal to transition to electronic customs data and electronic bills of lading.
- The 6th BIMSTEC Summit (April 2025) Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation opens access to 16 regional Bay of Bengal ports, presenting new maritime routing opportunities for Nepal.
- ·Nepal was advised to pursue Authorized Economic Operator Mutual Recognition Arrangements (AEO MRAs), modernize its Integrated Check Posts (ICPs), and begin transitioning inland infrastructure toward renewable energy and digital customs systems.

PRESENTATION 3: DIGITALIZATION FOR STRENGTHENING LLDC–SEAPORT CONNECTIVITY: INSIGHTS FROM INTERNATIONAL LOGISTICS AND NATIONAL INITIATIVES

PRESENTER: DR. DELGERNASAN MISHIG, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS, MONGOLIAN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, MONGOLIA

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Drawing on Mongolia's experience as the world's second-largest landlocked country, Ms. Mishig offered a detailed examination of digital enablers for LLDC seaport connectivity, including dry port integration, autonomous freight systems, and EV transition mandates. Highlights included:

- The structural trade obstacles facing LLDCs — high logistics costs, long transit times, and complex cross-border documentation — are driven by infrastructure gaps, administrative inefficiencies, weak intergovernmental coordination, and the absence of integrated data systems.
- UNESCAP's three strategic pathways for trade improvement are physical connectivity (dry port investment and corridor alignment), institutional connectivity (harmonized legal frameworks and joint transit committees), and digital connectivity (trade documentation digitization and fiber-optic infrastructure along transport routes).
- Dry ports function as inland extensions of coastal facilities, enabling customs clearance, cargo handling, and container stuffing entirely inland, thereby alleviating congestion at coastal gateways. Enabling technologies include cloud computing, AI, blockchain, big data analytics, and IoT.
- Mongolia's coal transport bottleneck illustrates the scale of LLDC logistics penalties: road transit costs consume 35% of the value of coking coal and 60% of thermal coal, while a standard 17-hour journey expands to 172 hours due to border congestion and customs queues.
- Mongolia has responded with a 453.3 km heavy-duty freight road under a PPP along the AH3 corridor, a mandate to lift electric transport vehicles to 15% of the domestic fleet, and the development of a regional motor vehicle insurance card system.
- The Mongolian University of Science and Technology is pioneering an Autonomous Driving Platooning Cross-border Transportation System — enabling one driver to operate three linked heavy-duty trucks through V2V and autonomous control, enabling 24/7 border transit and significantly improving customs throughput.

PRESENTATION 4: TRADE AND TRANSPORT FACILITATION IN THE ERA OF SUSTAINABILITY: REDUCING COST, TIME, AND CARBON IGHTS FROM INTERNATIONAL LOGISTICS AND NATIONAL INITIATIVES

PRESENTER: MR. MADHU MARASANI, FORMER SECRETARY (PERMANENT SECRETARY), MINISTRY OF INDUSTRIES, COMMERCE, AND SUPPLIES, NEPAL

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Mr. Marasani framed Nepal's connectivity challenges and opportunities within the global development architecture, articulating a structured action plan for reducing the cost, time, and carbon footprint of Nepal's trade operations. The presentation introduced the Kathmandu Commitment Action Plan. Key points included:

- LLDCs face a "Triple Burden" of 32% to 46% higher transport costs than coastal states, transit delays averaging over 40 days for imports, and high-carbon road dependence.
- External geopolitical shocks — including Red Sea and Strait of Hormuz disruptions — have spiked shipping insurance by over 300%, compounding the vulnerability of isolated economies.
- Nepal's World Bank-supported ACCESS program ($275 million) focuses on automating customs networks and developing climate-adaptive multi-lane highways.
- The Gandaki Triangle Corridor Project is projected to reduce freight costs by 25% and export clearance times by 30%.
- Nepal's Birgunj ICP handles over 50% of Nepal-India trade volume, while northern dry ports at Rasuwagadhi and Tatopani manage critical commercial links with China.
- Positioned between India and China, Nepal has access to a 2.8 billion-person market and an estimated $10 billion in unrealized transit trade potential.
- The BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement targets a 40% reduction in cargo damage and transit times, while the BIMSTEC Master Plan 2030 seeks documentation harmonization across seven member nations.
- Nepal's hydropower potential — technically feasible at 83,000 MW — positions green energy exports as a $2.4 billion annual revenue opportunity and a platform for sustainable logistics.
- The Kathmandu Commitment Action Plan outlines short-term e-customs single-window feasibility assessments (0–12 months), mid-term regional Electronic Cargo Tracking deployment (1–3 years), and a long-term transition to full paperless trade and green corridor carbon-reporting certifications (3–5 years).

PRESENTATION 5: STRENGTHENING LOGISTICS SERVICES: CLIMATE RESPONSIBILITY, SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS, AND DIGITALIZATION

PRESENTER: MR. ALEX TRAN, VIETNAM LOGISTICS ASSOCIATION, VIET NAM

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Based on the presentation by Alex Tran for the Vietnam Logistics Association (VLA), here is a comprehensive summary of the pathways toward an inclusive and green logistics ecosystem in the Asia-Pacific region:

- The Core Paradox and Challenge of Global Logistics: Logistics acts as the backbone of global commerce by powering 80% of international trade and driving regional economic growth. However, this vital sector comes with significant environmental and structural costs, contributing approximately 15% of greenhouse gas emissions across the Asia-Pacific region.
- Building a resilient and modern logistics network requires an integrated strategy across three overlapping dimensions rather than treating them as isolated silos. These comprise Climate Responsibility (slashing emissions through green infrastructure and modal shifts) , Social Safeguards (guaranteeing a just transition for the workforce via upskilling) , and Digital Transformation (leveraging IoT and data analytics to optimize routing and unlock measurable sustainability outcomes).
- Environmental sustainability has rapidly evolved from a voluntary corporate initiative into a strict international market requirement driven by global regulations like the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and Deforestation Regulation (EUDR).
- To hit its ambitious target of reducing overall national logistics costs to 12–15% of GDP by 2030, Vietnam is executing aggressive modal shift strategies. In Ho Chi Minh City, moving 80% of cargo by barge has successfully removed 2,000 truck trips daily from the roads, heavily reducing Scope 3 emissions.
- Digital Models and Port Innovation: VLA highlights the development of the "Buy–Ship–Pay" (BSP) reference model and the Digital Supply Network (DSN) to overcome the inefficiencies of isolated, stand-alone digital systems.
- Persistent Strategic Hurdles and Key Recommendations to ESCAP: Despite these gains, massive barriers remain across the Asia-Pacific region, notably high upfront technology costs for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), a lack of standardized cross-border emissions data, and uneven digital infrastructure. To overcome this, the presentation concludes with a call for UNESCAP to form a Regional Data Working Group for cross-border data sharing.

KEY DISCUSSION THEMES AND Q&A

The plenary Q&A and inter-session discussions generated substantive exchanges across several cross-cutting themes. The following represents a consolidated summary of the principal points raised.

Digital Infrastructure and the National Single Window

Nepal's National Single Window requires integration of dozens of separate government agencies. Participants questioned whether the Kathmandu Commitment's timeline for this streamlining was realistic.

The response from presenters emphasized that Nepal's trade policy framework is already embedded within existing government plans — the National Single Window is not being built from scratch. An interface system is already in place. The primary challenge is therefore one of execution and political commitment, not foundational design. It was also noted that Nepal's current system architecture holds certain technical advantages over comparable systems in the region.

Climate Resilience and Natural Disaster Risk

Nepal's vulnerability to floods and landslides raises the question of how digitalization contributes to disaster resilience in transport systems.

This question was directed to Mr. Alex Tran of the Vietnam Logistics Association. A detailed response was not captured in the session notes; however, the broader workshop discussion acknowledged that digital logistics systems — including real-time cargo tracking, electronic documentation, and cloud-based customs platforms — inherently reduce physical dependency and paper-based bottlenecks,

Green Freight, Electric Vehicles, and Clean Energy

Why are discussions on sustainable transport corridors encompassing low-carbon freight, EV adoption, and trucking sector transformation?

Presenters offered a clear rationale: Nepal's abundance of clean hydropower energy makes the transition to electric freight vehicles highly cost-effective in the medium to long term. As EV technology matures globally, green hydrogen will become an increasingly viable fuel option for converting diesel-dependent fleets. Additionally, Nepal's agreement with India to utilize inland waterways offers a dual benefit — substantially lower transport costs alongside a dramatically reduced carbon footprint per unit of trade. Multiple low-carbon pathways exist; what the transition requires is honest political commitment.

Government Alignment and Political Will

Given the depth of expert knowledge in the room, how can this workshop's vision be meaningfully translated into government policy and action?

Participants noted that Kathmandu's historical prosperity was rooted in its function as an active trade corridor between India and China. The path forward lies in Nepal proactively building the infrastructure required to channel and facilitate trade between these two major neighboring economies — not merely as a transit point, but as a value-adding node. The potential is substantial; realizing it depends on alignment across ministries and a willingness to prioritize implementation over planning.

CLOSING SESSION

CLOSING REMARKS — JOINT SECRETARY MR. UMESH BINDU SHRESTHA (MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, COMMERCE AND SUPPLIES)

Joint Secretary Shrestha brought the workshop to a close with a synthesis of the day's proceedings and a call to action. His remarks emphasized:

- Sustainable and digitally enabled transport corridors are a structural necessity for LLDCs — Nepal's long-term economic competitiveness depends on moving in this direction with urgency.
- The workshop's discussions on efficient transit infrastructure, regional cooperation, and transport sector reform are directly relevant to Nepal's trade competitiveness and economic integration agenda.
- Paperless trade, digital logistics, and climate-resilient infrastructure are not future aspirations — they are the operational baseline that Nepal must build toward in order to reduce trade costs, transit delays, and carbon emissions.
- Advancing regional connectivity requires coordinated multilateral engagement and meaningful public-private collaboration.
- Joint Secretary Shrestha advocated for sustained policy coordination, investment in green logistics, and deeper engagement with regional frameworks as foundational pillars of Nepal's long-term connectivity strategy.

KEY OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE WORKSHOP GENERATED THE FOLLOWING SUBSTANTIVE OUTCOMES AND FORWARD-LOOKING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF UNESCAP, NICCI, AND RELEVANT GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES.

- Nepal should accelerate its accession to UNESCAP's Framework Agreement on Cross-Border Paperless Trade (UN CPTA) to enable electronic customs data exchange and electronic bills of lading across trade corridors.
- The digitalization of Nepal's National Single Window must advance from planning to execution — the institutional and technical foundations are in place, and sustained political will is the determining variable.
- Border infrastructure at key Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) should be modernized to align with the emerging green maritime corridor framework, including renewable energy integration and digital customs systems.
- Nepal's government should pursue Authorized Economic Operator Mutual Recognition Arrangements (AEO MRAs) with key trading partners to reduce customs dwell times and streamline certified trader operations.
- Northern corridor constraints require direct diplomatic engagement. The restriction limiting Chinese border access to drivers — rather than full business personnel — must be resolved to unlock the corridor's trade potential.
- Cross-border payment integration with China should be expedited to reduce financial friction along the northern route.
- Investment in dry port capacity expansion, extended border operating hours, and rail infrastructure development should be prioritized as complementary hard infrastructure measures.
- Mongolia's Autonomous Driving Platooning system offers a compelling model for Nepal to explore in the context of long-haul freight on key corridors.
- Nepal's 83,000 MW technically feasible hydropower potential should be leveraged not only as a national energy asset but as the foundation of a green freight transition, powering domestic EV logistics fleets.
- The NICCI Trade and Transit Committee should convene a follow-up technical working session to develop an implementation matrix aligned with the Kathmandu Commitment Action Plan timelines.

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PARTICIPANTS

5

PRESENTATIONS

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NEWS OUTLET- MEDIA COVERAGE

GALLERY

on Enhancing Connectivity
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Sustainable Transport Corri
23 May 2026, Kathmandu, Nepal

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ATTENDANCE SHEET

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In collaboration with the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport (MoPIT)

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ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

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