

Opening Statement

by

Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia

Director General, ICWA

at

Seminar on

“BCIM Economic Corridor”

at

New Delhi

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I welcome you all most warmly to this Seminar at Sapru House. We are grateful to you for responding to our invitation to what promises to be a serious, sober and illuminating activity.

Experts assembled here, from different walks of life and equipped with varying experiences, will exchange views on an important subject of immense foreign policy interest. The expected result will be deepening of our mutual understanding and our contributing to further evolution of the concept of cooperation among BCIM countries: Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar.



(L-R) Ambassador Eric Gonsalves, Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia, DG, ICWA, Ambassador Rajeet Mitter, Ambassador V.S. Seshadri and Ambassador Sanjay Singh

I am happy to extend a special welcome to scholars from eastern India. I wish to particularly applaud the work of BCIM veterans who persevered for long before they began to be taken seriously. Without their initiative, stamina and success, this meeting would not have taken place.

This is an intellectual activity with a purpose. India's official delegation is in the midst of preparations for the first meeting of Joint Study Group, to be held in China shortly. It will involve “discussions on concepts and alignments of the economic corridor” and study of “the specific programmes on building the BCIM Economic Corridor.” Ministry of External Affairs, therefore, requested us to create an opportunity for seeking out and listening to opinions and recommendations of select members of the strategic community, including leading experts from our North East Region (NER). We welcome the Government’s willingness, nay keenness, to hear our perspectives that may go into the delegation’s brief and thus mould policy formulation as well as the eventual designing of BCIM-EC cooperation package.

I am confident that when the history of BCIM Forum is written, the year 2013 will deserve a very special mention. An exercise that began as Kunming Initiative, it has traversed a long path to culminate in the Kolkata-to-Kunming Car Rally in February 2013 and the 11th meeting of the Forum in Dhaka, also in February 2013. This formed the backdrop for the understandings reached between the governments of China and India that were reflected in the Joint Statements issued after the visit of the Chinese PM to India in May 2013 and our PM’s visit to China in October 2013. The former statement referred to an agreement to consult the other parties on “establishing a Joint Study Group on strengthening connectivity in the BCIM region for closer economic, trade and people-to-people linkages and initiating the development of a BCIM Economic Corridor.”

Debate about the co-relation between security and development dimensions of our external policy and the role of our NER in India's Look East Policy has gone on for long, both within and outside the Government. I am convinced that President Pranab Mukerjee has spoken the last word on this complex theme. Addressing different audiences in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland (on 29 November and 1 December 2013 respectively), he articulated the quintessence of the Indian State’s point of view:

The essential philosophy of ‘Look East’ foreign policy is that India must find its destiny by linking itself more and more with its Asian partners and the rest of the world. India's future and economic interests are best served by closer integration with the rest of Asia.

In his other remarks during the recent visit to NER, the esteemed President underlined that the states of Northeast are core stakeholders in India's LEP and they should “lead in making our neighbours partners in our development and harnessing the opportunities that are emerging from the rise of India and India's growing economic integration with the region.” He also stressed the need for the Centre and the states to work together for these goals.



Seminar in progress

This aptly sets the stage for our business-like dialogue today. We hope to avoid using old arguments, empty generalities, and polemics reflecting mutual recrimination. We may rather pay concentrated attention to spelling out a realistic vision of BCIM-EC by defining its contours, potential scope, integral elements, and practical modalities for realising the vision.

BCIM indeed relates to the entire length and breadth of the four countries. But, focussing on BCIM-EC here, we are probably concerned primarily with a small region comprising south-western China, our NER, eastern Bangladesh and western Myanmar.

In terms of the components of cooperation, we are going to talk about an unhindered flow not only of ideas but also of people, products, services, energy, investments and technology. It is no longer a matter about roads and transport links only; it is about setting up infrastructure and improving existing environment for new industrial production and new units of service industry etc. that create employment and contribute to visible economic development. It is about lowering the walls, but not our guard. In short, the BCIM-EC should concern itself with multi-faceted connectivity, economic cooperation, P-to-P exchanges, institutional links and much more.

We assure you that my team and I will work with you closely in order to develop a consensus view by the day's end and transmit our collective recommendations to the Government as quickly as possible.

Thank you very much for your attention and your participation.
