

**OPENING STATEMENT
ON BEHALF OF THE DELEGATION OF INDIA**

by
Eric Gonsalves

Our delegation is delighted to be in Dhaka. We wish to express our deep gratitude to our hosts for the excellent arrangements and generous hospitality.

We also wish to record our continuing expression of appreciation to the Yunnan Government and people for having started the Kunming Initiative. As we go through the documents of the last meeting held in Dhaka in 2002, the progress made is apparent. No one can deny that we could have achieved more but, given the starting point, we have made commendable progress, and I am confident the future will justify our confidence.

There is a continuing debate about putting BCIM on Track I. I would remind you of the Inaugural Address made by Secretary Rajiv Sikri at the 2006 Meeting in Delhi where he made the position of the Government of India clear. To me this debate is not as important as what we are actually able to achieve. Regional cooperation is undoubtedly impossible without governmental participation and action. However, as we will indicate in greater detail in the discussions on transport, trade and tourism, the Indian Government has stood by its commitment to support all worthwhile projects, and has undertaken a number of relevant and important initiatives since the last meeting. In our system, supporting action is also necessary from a variety of organisations from the business, academic and other non-governmental sectors to make any initiative fruitful. Hence they must all work together for satisfactory progress to be made. It is therefore best to set out long-term and annual programmes for ourselves at each of these meetings, and then work together through the year to fructify them.

In the coming year we will hold the Car Rally, a proposal of ours which has received endorsement at the highest level in our governments. I hope that by the time the next meeting in Kunming takes place in the following year, we can arrange a goods caravan from Kolkata to Kunming and that I might even be there to receive it.

India has approved a number of cross border facilitation measures on the India-Bangladesh and the India-Myanmar borders, which will go far to improve transport connectivity and foster trade and tourism. Including the link to Sittwe, I anticipate that a commitment of nearly a billion dollars has been made on these projects, and this will most likely increase further. With progress being made on the Asian Highway, and the Trans Asian Railway a solid base for transport connectivity is being established and we need to outline more concrete programmes which will take us further along this road. For this we need to request expert institutions such as the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and the Asian Institute of Transport (AIT) to prepare projects for more linkages. Then we can place these before governments and multilateral institutions for financing and implementation.

The initiatives taken by Chinese Eastern Airlines particularly need to be noted and commended. Here we have a public sector entity, which has successfully improved connectivity while following market principles.

When one takes up trade, there are already many lessons that we can learn from other organisations. The single market in Europe was not easily achieved, but it now provides for seamless trade transit and traffic in persons, goods and services across an entire continent. And they have not made concessions on security. They have used new tools that technology has made available to ensure that security is not compromised. Indeed the present South Asian systems of barriers and harassment are prone to corruption and generally counter-productive. All this can be turned into a win-win situation and not a zero sum game. The benefits in savings in costs have been estimated at between 15% and 35%, with parallel gains, which cannot be exactly quantified, in time saved, and contributions to human resources development.

None of these programmes can be successful without access to financial resources for investment. Our region has been successful in tapping multilateral institutions. But there is a need to go further and facilitate investment even from entrepreneurs within the region. I believe excellent investment opportunities already exist, and I submit that we take up this subject for serious consideration.

There is a common strand in all the objectives that our nations and peoples seek. The recent pronouncements of the President of India at the opening of Parliament, the Prime Minister of China at the Party Congress, and the Chief Adviser to the Bangladesh Government on the recent Anniversary of Independence make that point. Development must be planned today for the common man, so that all may participate in the benefits of economic growth.

There is no doubt that the countries of Asia are the makers of the future in the coming century. For this we must learn to improve our cooperation within Asia, and develop an Asian economic and political system. The Kunming Initiative or BCIM is a model for ensuring that this vision comes true.
