

Seventh BCIM Forum on Regional Economic Cooperation

Dhaka 31 March – 01 April 2007

Dhaka Statement 2007

- The Seventh Forum for regional economic cooperation between Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM) held in Dhaka from 31 March to 01 April 2007 reviewed the progress made since the first conference in Kunming (in 1999), China, which became known as *Kunming Initiative*.
- The Seventh BCIM Forum was organised by the *Centre for Policy Dialogue* (CPD), Dhaka. Participation included high level government officials, business leaders, representatives of civil society and research institutes. The Chinese delegation was led by *Mr Che Zhimin*, Deputy Secretary-General of Yunnan Provincial Government, the Indian delegation was represented by Former Ambassador *Mr Eric Gonsalves*, Member, Governing Body, Centre for Policy Research (CPR) and the Myanmar delegation by *H E Mr Maung Myint*, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Bangladesh delegation was led by *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, Chairman, CPD.
- It was observed that the successive BCIM forums have identified enormous potential for cooperation in this sub-region which is rich in natural resources, as well as people, across an area which represents the interface between East Asia, South-East Asia and South Asia. It is now necessary to further build on the mutual complementarity that exists among the countries of BCIM.
- It was recognised that considerable mutual benefits could be derived by strengthening cooperation in this sub-regional grouping. It was, therefore, agreed that this academic and civil society initiative, sustaining the BCIM process, should continue.
- It was further recognised that although the BCIM forums were organised at the Track II level, they provided useful and practical suggestions and directions as to how the BCIM initiative can and do fructify at the official level and can evolve into sub-regional programmes at government and non-governmental levels. In this context, the delegates agreed that at the Eighth BCIM Forum in Myanmar, an invitation may be extended to governments to send representatives.

- The Forum expressed satisfaction with the level of support that it has been receiving from the governments of the member countries, the academic and civil society institutes and the business community. It urged the cooperating institutions, organisations and the government departments to pursue broad-based support for further strengthening the BCIM cooperation.
- The Forum emphasised the critical importance of improved transport connectivity for efficient movement of goods and people in the interests of both regional and global competitiveness and in order to promote tourism and better understanding among the people.
- The Forum expressed satisfaction with the progress made so far, in preparing for the BCIM Car Rally 2007, scheduled for November 2007. The Rally is expected to contribute greatly in promoting efficient movement of goods and in developing people to people contacts. In this context, the Forum appreciated the support it is receiving from the respective Governments. The planned activities for the Car Rally route survey scheduled for May 2007 were also reviewed and found satisfactory.
- The Seventh BCIM Forum also agreed that initiatives should be taken to develop concrete proposals for consideration and follow up action by the national groups, business communities, and the civil society. In this context, the following areas were identified for priority attention:

⇒ ***Improving Trade Facilitation:*** The Forum felt that the level of existing intra-BCIM trade could be expanded manifold through appropriate initiatives in the area of market access, and removal of non-tariff barriers, trade facilitation measures, development of customs infrastructures, trade supporting investment and more exchanges between private sectors of the members countries including holding of regular trade fairs. The forum urges the BCIM governments to provide zero-tariff access for products of export interest to partner countries with a view to increasing trade among countries of the region. The Forum believes that BCIM countries should strengthen cooperation to build and develop trade related infrastructure including ports. Increased investment would facilitate economic cooperation.

The following concrete recommendations were made:

- Communication between businessmen, government officials, chamber bodies of the partner countries should be enhanced

- Officials of the forum members can be posted in the major cities of the partner countries to foster trade promotion.
- BCIM Trade centres have to be established in each of the BCIM member countries
- Certain ports in the region should be identified for entreport trade.
- Initiatives needs to be taken to promote border trade and obstacles in this should be removed
- The Forum urged the BCIM governments to simplify trans-border formalities for easy movement of goods, vehicles and people

⇒ ***Strengthening Transport Connectivity:*** Considering that physical infrastructure more or less exists for immediate connectivity among BCIM countries, which is expected to be further strengthened by the proposed BCIM Car Rally, the Forum decided that emphasis should now be on:

- Further improvement, on priority basis, of the existing and other possible alternative routes between BCIM countries, to the Asian Highway (AH) standards.
- Improvement of the facilitation measures at border crossings to promote seamless movement of vehicles, goods and passengers (without transshipment). BCIM should launch studies on this issue keeping in view the Asian Development Bank (ADB) initiative for a Regional Transport Study for BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation).
- Completion, on a priority basis, the missing links on the Trans Asian Railway (TAR) route between BCIM countries.

⇒ ***Enhancing Tourism Cooperation:*** Recognising the potential for enhanced tourism cooperation among BCIM countries, it is desirable that BCIM Liaison Offices pursue the matter with the respective national tourism organisations, and through them, seek assistance from the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) and Tourism Unit of UN-ESCAP for promoting sub-regional level cooperation. The Forum particularly emphasised the need for facilitating speedy visa issuance by the respective BCIM countries to enhance tourism across the region.

⇒ ***Promoting Educational, Scientific, Cultural and Social Exchanges:*** BCIM sub-region being rich in all the above mentioned areas, BCIM Coordination

Office in *Kunming* should encourage mutual exchanges among educational, scientific, cultural and social organisations of the member countries.

- The Forum requested the donor countries and agencies to extend their support and cooperation to BCIM Liaison Offices to undertake the studies, and promote cooperation programmes that will be identified in the process of implementing this statement.
- It was decided that the Eighth Meeting of the BCIM Forum will be held in Myanmar in 2008 where further progress under the purview of BCIM cooperation will be reviewed.
- The delegates expressed deep appreciation for the participation at various sessions by high-level representatives of the Government of Bangladesh.
- The delegates also expressed their gratitude to the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and all other host institutions and individuals in Dhaka for their generous hospitality and meticulous organisation of a very successful meeting.

Signed at Dhaka on 1st April, 2007

Bangladesh Delegation:

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(*Professor Rehman Sobhan*)

Chinese Delegation:

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(*Mr Che Zhimin*)

Indian Delegation:

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(*Ambassador Eric Gonsalves*)

Myanmar Delegation:

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(*H E U Maung Myint*)