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Some Thoughts on Strengthening Transport Connectivity and Communication in BCIM Region

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It is my pleasure to participate in BCIM Forum once more. The four countries have been connected by rivers and mountains, there has been a long history of economic and trade ties and cultural communication. This region belongs one of the areas that has the earliest interaction and longest cooperation in the world. In ancient times, BCIM region had been connected by “Southern Silk Route” and “Ancient Tea Horse Road”, which became the convenient channel access to South Asia from Yunnan and Southwest of China. In modern times, “Stilwell Road” and “The Hump” linked this region again, which has made great contribution to the victory of the world antifascist war. For more than two thousand years, the friendly exchanges between Yunnan of China and BCIM region has never been interrupted, not only communication and cooperation had been enhanced, but also the common development of economy and society has been to some extent achieved. Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar are the parties to the Asian Highway Network. China, India and Myanmar signed “Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network” in 2004, Bangladesh became the party to the Agreement in 2009. In the Asian Highway Network Agreement, the route connecting four countries has been in plan, the total mileage accounts for 43,288 km. In the new historical opportunity conditions, it is significant to continuously promote transport connectivity and communication in BCIM region. However, with the cooperation deepened, transportation barriers lead to salient impact for economic and trade cooperation.

I Status Quo of Transportation Connectivity and Communication between China with Bangladesh, India and Myanmar

Yunnan located the southwest of China could be connected with Bangladesh, India and Myanmar through Trans-Asian Highway, Pan-Asian Railway, waterway and air routes

1. **Air Routes Open in Operation One by One.** Under the four countries’ cooperation mechanism driven and joint efforts by India and China, on December 4, 2000, the business charter flights between Kunming to New Delhi was firstly opened in Yunnan province, which ended the long history without air links between China and India. On March 28, 2002, China Eastern Airlines operated the maiden direct flight MU563 from Beijing to New Delhi, since then the direct air routes were

officially opened. In the same month, the direct air route from Shanghai to Mumbai also began in operation. On April 1, 2002, Yunnan Airlines (now join China Eastern Airlines Group) opened the air route from Kunming to Mandalay on the basis of opening the air route from Kunming to Yangon, which became the first international air route in Mandalay airport. On October 27, 2002, with the effort of Yunnan province, Beijing-New Delhi flight began to carry out the technical stop in Kunming, which increased the number of international air route access to South Asia. During "Tourism Golden Week" in May, 2003, it was the first time that Yunnan opened the tourist charter flights to Maldives. On May 18, 2005, China Eastern Airlines officially opened the international air route linking Beijing, Kunming and Dhaka. On October 29, 2007, Kunming Branch of China Eastern Airlines opened the maiden flight from Kunming to Kolkata. On September 20, 2009, after the flight opened from Kunming to Kolkata and Dhaka, the third international air route linking Yunnan and South Asia was opened, which was the air route from Kunming to Kathmandu, Nepal's capital. On August 31, 2010, Kunming-Colombo-Male air route was officially in operation. In July 2011, Mangshi-Mandalay air route was opened in Dehong Dai and Jingpo Ethnic Autonomous Prefecture. Through this "golden line in the air", there is one more "air corridor" linking Yunnan with Southeast and South Asia. The idea of "morning off from Mangshi, evening can enjoy the breeze and beautiful scenery" could be come true. Apart from Yunnan province, at present there are direct flights to New Delhi from Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

2. Road Network Construction is Accelerating. After 1999, China's Western Development Strategy has been implemented, Yunnan identified to build the international passageway connecting Southeast and South Asia as one of the three major goals. Since 2000, Yunnan invested more than 10 billion Yuan to road construction annually, the construction of the road network linking with neighboring countries have been speed up. By 2005, every prefecture has constructed the direct highway connecting with Kunming. Since 2004, 10 express highway and above level has started the construction in Yunnan province. By the end of 2007, the restoration and revival of the main national-level highway have been completed. At present, there are four international passageway to be open in traffic. The domestic section of highway within China connecting Kunming with Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos and Thailand have also completed the upgradation. The construction of the traffic line have also been accelerated between Bangladesh and Myanmar and India and Myanmar. In 2001, India provided the aid to build 160 km highway linking India and Myanmar. In April 2002, the foreign ministers from India, Myanmar and Thailand agreed to build a trilateral road linking India (Moreh) via Myanmar (Bagan) with Thailand (Mae Sot). At the same time, they also agreed to open an ocean shipping route linking Kanchanaburi of Thailand via Dawei Deepwater port with ports of India. In 2004, Bangladesh and Myanmar started to build Dhaka-Yangon Highway, the construction agreement was officially signed in April. The construction inaugural ceremony was held in Ramu, 15 km away from Cox Bazaar, the eastern town in Bangladesh. From February 8 to 16, 2012, the route survey team consist of 13 persons

from four countries successfully completed the car rally route survey. Under the support of four countries' governments, the survey realized its goal in safe and smooth manner. The whole survey lasted 9 days, crossed 4 international borders and covered 2,820 km. There were more than 20 cities on the way. The length of route in China, Myanmar, India and Bangladesh was 750 km, 961 km, 558 km and 548 km respectively. Apart from poor condition of 3.3 km by ferry and certain sections (Mandalay-Kay Lay, Moreh-Imphal, Imphal-Silchar), the roads could be connected and meet the requirement for car rally.

3. Railway Links Have Been Improved. Within China, the railway projects from Kunming to Dali and Lijiang have been completed and put into operation. But the construction of Dali- Baoshan section due to the problem of surface temperature too high in GaoLiGong Mountain need to be implemented step by step. Within Myanmar, there are requirements to unify the track gauge from Lashio in the east to Kalay in the west. There is no railway links between Kalay and Tamu. Within the territory of the northeast of India and Bangladesh, there are missing section between Tamu to Jiribum and both sides of Bangabandhu Bridge.

4. Waterway Shipping Orderly Carry Out. The Mekong-Lancang river held a maiden voyage ceremony in 2001. Through Bhama port on Irrawaddy River the convenient channel could be built entering into the Indian Ocean from Yunnan province. If the revision of the inland water transport agreement between India and Bangladesh could be better used, then the bilateral connectivity and communication would be largely improved.

II Main Existing Problems of Transport Connectivity and Communication in BCIM Region

Although the present cooperation among four countries appears steadily rising trend, but the traffic infrastructure backwardness and the poor connectivity and communication between countries have caused great trouble for trade exchange. The existing transport infrastructure in a short period could only barely meet the cross-border transportation requirement, but we need conceive a forward-looking strategic idea in response to increasing regional transportation development and growth demand. Summing up the existing main problems of transportation connectivity and communication in BCIM region could be classified into the following four points:

1. The four countries have paid less attention to the international land transportation facilitation convention with not enough understanding. In the seven international land transportation facilitation conventions, China and India only joined one of them, Bangladesh and Myanmar have not joined yet.

2. Too many restrictions for cross-border vehicles, goods and people. Such as the mutual recognition and the authentication for commercial vehicles, registration,

driving and the third party liability insurance; the unification of the technical standards and specifications for vehicles, the traffic regulations and signal indication etc; setting up the goods inspection and quarantine, customs clearance and facilitation management system; complicated procedures for visa application and cross-border pass.

2. **Infrastructure could not satisfy the demand.** The construction standard of existing roads and bridges are different, there are missing sections and boundary management facilities need to be bettered.

4. **The passenger and cargo cross-border transportation facilitation framework agreement has not been signed yet.** Through comprehensive consultation and intensive study, the four countries should follow the practice of greater Mekong Regional Cooperation to sign the cross-border transportation facilitation framework agreement.

III Suggestions for Strengthening Transport Connectivity and Communication in BCIM Region

In order to further promote the realization of transport connectivity and communication in BCIM region, we put forward the following suggestions in view of the above problems:

1. **Construct and Repair Missing Sections.** With the completion of the road survey for the car rally, it is necessary to build and improve the missing sections for realizing the smooth traffic in the short period.
2. **Make Full Use of Water Transportation Advantage.** Under the background of joint research on economic rationality of water transportation by India and Bangladesh, China and Myanmar's government also need to conduct the joint research on how to play the potential role and advantage of inland water transport.
3. **Establish Wide Cooperation in National and Local Transport Departments among Countries.** The railway construction and reconstruction project in different countries should be carried out on the basis of coordination and unification. The vehicle axle load limit should be standardized.

4. **Specific Issues of Transport Connectivity and Communication should be discussed in depth on BCIM Forum.** As for visa problems, is it possible to consider to expand the scope of visa-free, from the personnel with diplomatic or official passport to the personnel with ordinary passport?

5. **Increase Number of South Asian Specialized Agencies and Bodies in Kunming.** India and Bangladesh are considering to open the consulate in the western region of

China. In view of the background of increasingly economic and trade cooperation and active cultural exchange between Yunnan and South Asia, Kunming as the permanent host of China-SAARC Exhibition should actively strive for South Asian countries consulates to open here to facilitate people-to-people contacts and information exchange.

Thank you!