



CSIRD

**Report  
Interactive Session  
on  
*Enhancement of Transport Cooperation between India and China*  
19<sup>th</sup> August, 2016**

On 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2015, an interactive session was conducted by the Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development, Kolkata, India (CSIRD) with the Department of Transport, China. The Chinese delegation was led by Mr. Wang Yunshan, senior advisor at the Department of Transport, China. Other members of the delegation were Mr. Xu Shaoneng, Director, Division of General Planning, Department of Transport of Yunnan Province of China, Ms. Peng Zhihui, Director, Division of International Cooperation, Department of Transport of Yunnan Province of China, Mr. Dou Chaowei, Official, Department of Transport of Yunnan Province of China and Mr. Yu Canqin, Official, Department of Transport of Yunnan Province of China. The Indian delegation was represented by Dr. Binoda K. Mishra, Director of CSIRD Prof. H.S. Vasudevan, Prof. Jayanta Acharya, Dr. Arpita Basu Roy, Dr. Kingshuk Chatterjee. The conference aimed at improving the transportation ties between the two countries and alternative transportation routes. It was easily adjudged that the participants viewed trade not only as means of economic increment, but cultural cohabitation and overall regional development. At numerous points of the discussion, it was noted that travel and cultural migration will greatly benefit the ambitious OBOR (One Belt/One Road) initiative. The session also focused on the role of culture and academics.

The highlights from the interaction are as follows –

(i) The Senior Advisor began the conversation by noting that Yunnan was an integral part of the Silk Road – the historic trade route that is still active. Trade and in effect development prospers only after efficient transportation is established to carry the two out. The BCI (Bangladesh-

## **Report : Interactive Session with the Department of Transport, Yunnan Province (No.23)**

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China-India) route is an important one for the development of Kolkata. He noted that a Joint Road Investigation had taken place in 2012 in the BCIM (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar) belt. The project was historic because it was the first time such an investigation was taking place between the countries in forty (40) years. The Advisor also impressed upon the fact that the Yunnan Department of Transportation was highly invested in and excited about developing transportation between neighboring countries. In status quo, there exists two hundred and thirty-six thousand (236,000) km of roadways, five (5) national highways and three (3) waterways. Laos, Thailand and Burma are connected through the most roads and highways. Meanwhile, the waterways flow through and assist Cambodia and Vietnam. Additionally, upwards of 7 routes connect Laos and Vietnam. These routes are also connected to India via Burma. Thereby, it was evident that Yunnan and West Bengal share great scope for development. The Advisor stated that mutual development and understanding would lead to pragmatic cooperation between Yunnan and India. The BCIM initiative would have a trickle-down effect for all states involved. The route would not only benefit China, but the entire BCIM corridor.

(ii) The follow up to the opening remarks were made by Prof. H.S. Vasudevan who noted that the K2K (Kolkata to Kunming) Forum was a part of the conversation. The K2K, as he stated, was five years old and had brought into its purview many practical aspects of the conversation.

(iii) Dr. B.K. Mishra continued the conversation by stating that the K2K Forum has added substantially to the BCIM conversation. The BCIM idea was birthed in 2008 in Dali, at the K2K Forum. Kolkata and Kunming were declared sister cities at the same forum. It is also worth noting that initial calls for greater land connectivity following air connectivity were also made at the K2K Forum. Report number 27, under section 5 of the Calcutta Declaration also called for greater connectivity between South China and East India. He noted that the reports and the forums had condensed the civilian energies and arguments and the onus lay on the governments to execute the will made evident. The role of the academics was clear – they were responsible for building rationale by way of joint studies and publications. The K2K forum has led to institution-to-institution interaction between the brightest minds from Chinese Universities and Calcutta University.

## **Report : Interactive Session with the Department of Transport, Yunnan Province (No.23)**

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(iv) Prof. Acharya, an economist by training, acknowledged the accomplishments and importance of the K2K Forum. However, his interests lay in more investigative questioning. He asked the following questions –

- a. What is the attitude of the Chinese Government towards the building of roadways in India?
- b. Is there a serious commitment towards rolling out the plan?
- c. Has the Chinese Government undertaken any research to conduct feasibility studies?
- d. Were there any ties made with Universities in China akin to those in India between the government and the Calcutta University?
- e. Were the attendees in possession of data regarding the economics of undertaking a road building project?
- f. Was the Department of Transportation of Yunnan Province willing to sponsor any study on the land commission?

(v) The questions were answered in the affirmative in the following points –

- a. The Economic University of Yunnan Province carries out surveys and studies and has Centres that publish reports etc.
- b. The delegation collectively answered that they were in possession of the data; however, it was not published.
- c. The Department had, in the current year and in the past, sponsored many projects where they studied rivers for international collaboration. Institutions selected by the Chinese Government conduct the surveys and are wholly sponsored for the same. The ongoing meeting at the CSIRD was an example of such state-sponsored projects.

(vi) Dr. Arpita Basu Roy furthered the discussion by noting that a trust building exercise is essential for the countries, i.e. China and India, involved. The same can be ensured through academic and cultural exchanges. She emphasized that along with road and air connectivity, connectivity via waterways should be given equal importance. Kolkata already has a port of its

## Report : Interactive Session with the Department of Transport, Yunnan Province (No.23)

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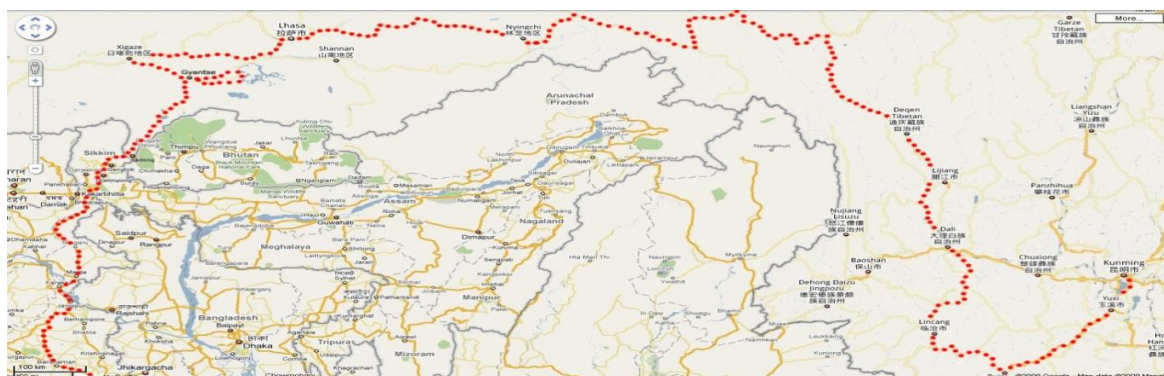
own which could be made use of. The move to make such use would not only benefit the Indian market but also reduce the costs incurred by Chinese exporters to move their shipment. The shift from the Mumbai port, which is currently used to transport goods, to the Calcutta Port would be mutually beneficial. Aside from transport cooperation, tourism zones could be formed in the BCIM Corridor.

(x) The Director stated that a joint research programme with the CSIRD for waterways research would be pursued. He inquired if there were other routes that were as favoured as the proposed waterway navigations.

(xi) Dr. Mishra proposed an alternative to the BCIM Corridor: the Tea and Horse Route. The same is one of the oldest routes between India and China. The route begins from Kolkata through Sikkim, Nepal, Lhasa, Nyingchi, Tibet, Lijiang, Dali, Lincang to Kunming.

The route is, however, not without controversy because of the extended roadways through Tibet. It was also noted that the conversation needed to involve more representatives from other countries. The same, however, could prove to be difficult because of the politically volatility of Burma. The BCIM corridor relies on political stability. Other studies could be conducted; however, research per se would not be feasible. Practical problems with opening the Stilwell roads were also of concern, particularly because it was not an economic but a political problem.

### *The Tea and Horse Route:*



## **Report : Interactive Session with the Department of Transport, Yunnan Province (No.23)**

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The conference ended with favorable results. The Chinese delegation showed willingness to carry out joint research study and feasibility study on road and waterways connection. They also realized the importance of connecting the two nations via the waterway port in Kolkata. However, the success of the interactive session will depend upon the governments of both the nations.